

LONDON NIGHTS



Stephen Graham

Mary A. Lathrop

London Nights

STEPHEN GRAHAM



A MAN WITH A PAST BUT NO FUTURE

London Nights

*Studies and Sketches of London
at Night*

By

Stephen Graham

Author of "Under London," etc.



New York
George H. Doran Company

COPYRIGHT, 1926,
BY GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY



LONDON NIGHTS
— B —
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

to

PERCY HORD

WHOSE INTEREST IN THESE NOC-
TURNAL ADVENTURES AND IN RICK
ELMES' PICTURES DID MUCH TO
BRING THIS VOLUME INTO BEING

Contents

	PAGE
1 LONDON NIGHTS	13
2 AN EMBANKMENT NIGHT	30
3 A TOUR OF THE COFFEE-STALLS	36
4 COVENT GARDEN AT DAWN	43
5 A DOSS-HOUSE NIGHT	50
6 IN THE CRYPT OF ST. MARTIN'S	56
7 AT THE SETTLES STREET SHELTER	61
8 THE FIRES OF SMITHFIELD	65
9 A NIGHT THAT ENDED AT BILLINGS- GATE	72
10 FISH, FISH, ART THOU IN THY DUTY?	79
11 THE BEGGARS	84
12 THE PAVEMENT ARTISTS	89
13 CURFEW IN BERWICK STREET	96
14 AT A CONFIDENCE AUCTION	100
15 AN EVENING AT WANDSWORTH GAOL	108
16 BLACK DAWN AT PRISON GATES	113
17 PRISON NIGHTS	120
18 IN THE CHURCHYARDS	134
19 HUMAN DERELICTS	140
20 AT TOYNBEE HALL	146
21 COMING HOME FROM THE DERBY	152
22 THE CAFÉ BARS	158
23 SOHO AND NIGHT CLUBS	165
24 PUTTING SOHO TO BED	171
25 EVENINGS IN CHINATOWN	174
26 AT CHARLEY BROWN'S	177
27 SATURDAY MIDNIGHT AT PICCA- DILLY CIRCUS	181
28 MORAL PERILS	188
29 IN THE FOURPENNY GALLERY	194
30 AT THE OTHER END OF TOWN	204

CONTENTS

	PAGE
31 ELECTION NIGHT (DECEMBER, 1924)	210
32 AT BATTERSEA (MARCH 6TH, 1925)	217
33 AROUND ST. PAUL'S AT MIDNIGHT	221
34 IN ROTHERHITHE TUNNEL	227
35 THE THAMES TUNNELS AND THE STAIRS	230
36 DRIVING IN LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT	235
37 MIDNIGHT DRIVE TO HIGH BEECH CHURCH	240
38 A VISION OF KENSAL GREEN	244
39 ZERO HOUR	248
40 CHIAROSCURO	251

List of Illustrations

A MAN WITH A PAST BUT NO FUTURE	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
FLOWERY FACES AT COVENT GARDENS	32
“NAH THEN, FAIRY, GET A MOVE ON!”	44
A LONG PROCESSION OF PORTERS AND BOXES	82
A FAMOUS R. A. (ROAD-HARTIST) DRAWS A TIGER	94
CHARACTERS AT AN ALDERSGATE STREET BAR	122
AT AN EAST END SHELTER	144
BILLINGSGATE FISH-PORTERS	178
INSIDE ONE OF THE TUNNELS	230
FROM KING EDWARD'S STEPS	246

London Nights.

CHAPTER I

London Nights

OUR days are democratic; our nights are feudal. For if there is a seeming equality by day, there is an evident disparity by night. Though dukes and tramps may walk Piccadilly in the sunlit hours there is no such companionship in the night. Then doss-house and mansion are like serf's hut and baronial castle. Thus the past has a stronger hold on the night than it has on the day. Equality and fraternity come with the sun, lightening and warming us on our way—but they go down with the same. Night sends each to his home, to his own place.

At the same time London is more beautiful by night; there is a poetry in it which is missed by day. The night skies and the fogs hold it and brood over it, the many voices are hushed, and out of all the discordancies of the day comes an issue of peace. The strivers rest from their striving, the workers from their work.

Darknesse closeth wearie eyes,
Saying to man it doth suffice;
Henceforth repose—thy work is done.

A gentle hand which is not of London has been raised and then lowered again, and the brows of the many have been smoothed. The monition of Nature outbreathes from the midnight hours;

Sleep, mournful heart, and let the past be past;
Sleep, happy soul, for all will sleep at last.

LONDON NIGHTS

Therefrom a feeling of exaltation creeps into the minds of those who watch while London sleeps—a sense of the majesty of seven million sleepers altogether under the one tent-roof of the London night, a sense of the repose of the vast, shadowy forms of our architecture and of the lamps, which, like candles shining, might be at ten thousand altars. A great silence is made audible by our thoughts. London at night speaks to the heart, telling its dreams of humanity that has passed, whispering melancholy stories to the melancholy, and strange thoughts to the stranger.

London is a dark city. It has not the street lighting of New York; it has more blinds than Paris. There is no opalescence as of Moscow snow. There are not the white buildings and spaciousness of Stockholm. Our walls are dark. Fog dims our far-off lights; our street lamps have haloes. As you stand on a bridge or sit on the Embankment the petty lights drip into the unseen but steady-flowing river and give romantic and fantastic effects, as if our London were an unreal world. The glimmering *chiaroscuro* enchants the eye and beguiles the beholder to tarry longer. Even though the river damp creep to his knees he still sits and gazes from his bench or leans o'er the stone parapet. Wonderful! The customed eye descries the glimmer of the surface of the river mud, and on the surface of the water remarks the presence of birds; even the unaccustomed takes in the moving eye of barge or tug and the fast-

LONDON NIGHTS

passing lights of a patrol boat. These in the midst of Father Thames, but from the lights o' London, a hundred waving splashes of reflected beams, like bunting made of light.

On the Lambeth side London looks more portentous than from Westminster or Chelsea. If there should happen to be a late sitting of the Commons, the pilot light will be burning above Big Ben and the windows of St. Stephen's will be gleaming—darkness made visible! I have seen it thus at two in the morning. Despite the lights which lit up the debate the House seemed dark to those who sat on the Embankment benches. Parliament seemed to me, not a palace of democracy, but some massive, shadowy Bastille. You could imagine it to be all cells and grills and bolts and bars and torture chambers, not the hall of liberation, but the fortress where our liberties were imprisoned.

In twos and threes and fours on the cold seats at two in the morning the sleepy derelicts stared across the river at the light-reflections and the Houses of Parliament. They were the outcasts of the social system, *disjecta membra* of our inhospitality, each with his story, his tragedy, his tragedy-comedy, spending thus the midnight hours:

Weeping and waiting for the morrow.

Look at them carefully, they are burlesques. Think of them carefully; they are the outer audi-

LONDON NIGHTS

ence of the honourable member for this and the gallant and honourable member for that and the right honourable gentleman, the member for that other. This is the real outer audience, which sees and hears nothing, and understands nothing, sitting in the *undistinguished* Strangers' Gallery.

Some have fallen asleep. The head of one hangs backward from his neck like a dead carnation. But most sleep with their chins on their chests. On one or two benches some manage to sleep lying in the space between the metal division in the middle and the support at the end of the seat. But a constable on night duty makes his round and taps the sleepers bidding them wake up and put their feet down.

Why do so many go to the Embankment to spend the night? It is always cold there; the damp airs from the river search the rags and the bodies of the homeless there. The beauty of the night is nothing to the homeless.

"If I'd a known it was goin' to be so cold I'd a taken another dozen matches," says one. "With another dozen I wouldn't a bin out this night."

But his neighbour is quite apathetic. He does not sell matches; he hasn't the initiative. Or it needs too much patience.

We look on the match-sellers in the daylight hours without much understanding.

"A pretext for begging," I hear it said.

"He wants me to give him a penny; he doesn't want me to buy matches," says another.

LONDON NIGHTS

A great mistake. Match-sellers are not beggars. They want you to buy their matches. They may hope that you will give more than a penny for a box, but every box you buy from an unfortunate in the street helps toward the eightpence or ninepence required to pay for shelter in a lodging-house, helps to take a man or woman off the Embankment and put him in a warm building for the night. The same applies to other petty hawkers. In my opinion they are more to be encouraged than the many street dancers and singers who, masquerading as unfortunates, draw away the pennies of the charitably disposed.

Not that a pass to a doss-house is a cure for out-cast London. I have slept in these strange, de-socialised caravanserais. It is unwonted, I must say, to undress in a general lodging-house, in the company of hundreds of men of all ages. Your bed is a lonely place. It does not matter that it is not comfortable, for you realise that it is paradise compared with the Embankment. If it prove to swarm with insects you realise that you are tender and that the *habitués* do not feel the bites so much. The most depressing atmosphere of homelessness; no woman or child enters where the men are except in thought or prayer. Yet the young men might have mothers, fathers, homes; the middle-aged, many of them, must have wives and families somewhere; the old men must, by their looks, be grandfathers, and should have little children prattling at their knees. But each seeks

LONDON NIGHTS

his narrow bed, and none talks to his neighbour. There is none of the vivid talk of Gorky's "Lower Depths," but a sense of intense British respectability and reserve. Many of the men sleep stark naked, partly because they have no night attire, but more commonly because, if they sleep in their shirts, they infallibly take upon them the curse of institutional bedding. Tramps though they are, and raggedly clothed, they believe they are in themselves cleaner than the doss-houses where they sleep.

Even the best-kept of lodging-houses can give an unpleasant impression to a man accustomed to live in a civilised home. Yet there are tens of thousands who have to sleep in such places every night. You may meet among them people from all ranks of society, though, naturally, the "well-connected" are rare. The war gave to many rank and pride of place and authority. Peace struck our great army to a million shivers. The captains, the majors, the "temporary gentlemen"—there are many on the Embankment now, many in "Bruce House" and "Jack's Palace" and the Church Army and Salvation Army shelters. Tragedy has engulfed their lives since the moment of demobilisation.

One homeless fellow tramps London every day, sells laces sometimes, sleeps where he can, and is desperate. A social worker took up his case and found it very characteristic. He married during the war and his wife lived on the soldier's allow-

LONDON NIGHTS

ance. They got together some of the elements of a home and stored them. But he has never found any regular peace work. His wife is in domestic service as a Miss So-and-so, keeping the marriage quiet, as if it were a secret sin. He needs her, but cannot have her. She needs him, but cannot have him. But, "Find my husband a job," she implores; "find him at least a shelter for his head, some place where I can come to him and care for him."

At length the police fasten upon such a type, and he is arrested for loitering or for some supposed impropriety, and he gets the best lodging in years—in prison. Very good seems the prison to many like him, a hotel with regular meals and a private room. Prison is better than the work-house. Not a few seek it.

Prison, however, is not always vouchsafed. There are thousands whom the police will not arrest. The magistrate's time must not be taken up with the outcast of the streets. His menu of crime is thoughtfully studied. His morning task would not be enviable if every one found sleeping in the public streets was brought up, or if every one indulging in foul remarks were haled before him. The police learn to be indulgent to the unfortunate.

"Nah then, fairy!" says a policeman to a collapsed drab in Covent Garden; "time to move. Don't you hear the birds begin to sing?"

In all manner of holes and corners the homeless

LONDON NIGHTS

may be found sleeping on winter nights; 'mid the ruin of half-demolished houses, on the stairs leading from viaducts, in corners of the Blackwall Tunnel, in recesses in massive buildings, in porches of churches. Many have their secret lairs. On the other hand, many frankly walk all night and get a good sleep somewhere during the day. I came on one on a cold February night in Covent Garden. It was the desolate hour of three. Long before the winter market opens. She was a diminutive spare old woman with red cheeks, small eyes, bobbed hair. She walked and she walked. There was something hyena-like in her movements back and forth in Tavistock Street. When I went up to her she stopped, but she had nothing to say for herself. She stared from her blank little eyes and said nothing. It was like talking to an animal. When I gave her twopence to get some hot tea at Goodfare's—she made a pretence of going there, but reserved the money and still said nothing. Later I saw her standing staring at the red coffee-stall by St. Paul's Church, three yards away from it, however. But she did not buy anything.

One commonly meets the night-walkers near the coffee-stalls. You can tell them by the state of their boots. They walk to keep warm, and wear out other people's discarded boots. They willingly talk to you, if only to kill time, if only on the chance of your standing a coffee and a saveloy.

Not a few feed on the promiscuous charity of the all-night coffee-stall. The coffee-stalls are a

LONDON NIGHTS

great institution of the London night. Their red-painted panels glow in the darkness; their tall urns gleam. They are sections of bright kitchens transported to dark corners in the depths of the night and made public and open for all. They have a wonder-look. They seem to be part of a sort of night fairyland.

Thither resort the night watchmen, or pressmen who have put the morning paper ready, or M. P.'s from a late sitting, or men and women from dances, or heavily-muffled workmen on night jobs. Hurrying motor-cars suddenly stop, and strange fellows come out to eat hard-boiled eggs. The off-scourings of the streets stand around and beat themselves to keep warm, and prattle to the customers. Upon occasion Duke meets drab, and Prince meets pauper.

As I shall recount later, there is a legend that the Prince of Wales stopped one night at the coffee-stall at Hyde Park Corner and stood every one all round all that he wanted.

"I hope one of you might do the same for me if ever I was down and out," he is reported to have said.

Old Joe would no doubt be fully entitled to write over his stall, *As Patronised by Royalty*; or over his coffee, *As Supplied to the Aristocracy*, for at Hyde Park Corner in the early hours of the morning the extremes often meet.

Go, however, to a similar resort at East India Docks or in Beresford Square, or in Aldgate High

LONDON NIGHTS

Street, and you find no romantic admixture from high society or the dance club world. The East End at night is much more drab than the West End. It has its after-midnight resorts, gambling dens and opium parlours, but they are few compared with those of the West End. Westerners do not go down to the East End for a crown of debauch except in melodramas. When the Chinese are raided the police generally find seamen and other denizens of dockland.

At your coffee-stall in Whitechapel you pay and go. The life of the homeless is more dismal and less observed. The East End goes to sleep earlier than the West End. It gets up earlier also. At eleven the great highways are emptying fast. At midnight they are dark and deserted. Shadow shapes on blinds show people rapidly undressing. Lights pop out as the East End pops into bed. The whole of Commercial Road snores in chorus at half-past twelve. At one you are carefully watched by the police, and particulars of your appearance are written down in their notebooks. At two you can reckon on being followed by policemen to the end of their beats. They will "keep you under observation."

It is a strange, eerie experience to spend a night walking the streets of the East End. You are alone, as it were, with the dead till the alarm clocks begin to go off. To walk under the Thames by the Rotherhithe Tunnel or the Greenwich Passage at three, with not another soul in view,

LONDON NIGHTS

unless it be some huddled, expressionless sleeper, is an experience not to be forgotten. You might be exploring the tombs of buried London thousands of years hence; you are out of time and the hour; you have entered the grand mystery of life. You feel like the Wandering Jew, one man alive when all the rest of the world has died.

An almost similar feeling of mysterious experience overtakes you in the still, dead, deserted Chinese quarter, so much over-written, so much suspected. Limehouse Causeway sleeps, Pennyfields sleeps. Pekin Street seems as remote from reality as Pekin. All is shuttered. Lamps on brackets illuminate blank first-floor windows. There is not a shriek, not a scream, not a murmur, not a whisper, not a policeman on the corner, not a waiting motor. The respectable Chinese sleep with their Whitechapel wives. If they have secrets, they seem to keep them well.

In Soho and at the back of Tottenham Court Road one does obtain a lurid impression of night-life. The night-clubs flourish. There is dancing and drinking and drug-taking and immorality. It is open to all who have the password. It is notorious. The police look on and are powerless.

The West End has its glamour. There, for a long while, the darkness which prevails on the Embankment and elsewhere is defeated. Piccadilly Circus is our equivalent of the Great White Way. Electric light wastes there like life itself. It glows, it dazzles, it flares to heaven. All the

LONDON NIGHTS

moths of London come and stare at it; the lights of pleasure and the lights of vice. Something not to be missed by the visitor to London is to drive in an open car up Piccadilly at night—to the Circus. All the sedate clubs are like lodges. All the lamp-posts, now painted to look like aluminium, have a processional aspect, as if they indicated the way to court, to the great gates, to the throne. Effulgence rolls to you along the magnificent avenue. You are one of a great throng all making the same way, all going to the Circus, all going to the great gate of something. Silk hats take colour reflections. Light holds every one in one movement. It is grand. But, unfortunately, it is deceptive. The gates lead nowhere; they are the gates of nothing.

There are various cafés

Where sit a company with heated eyes
Expecting when a fountain should arise.

Hot-blooded men carouse with women of the carmined lip and hennaed hair. These cafés are open to all, and are yet somewhat in the nature of clubs, for every one seems to know every one else. The men chatter across tables. The women go from man to man:

“What sort of a life is your wife leading you now?”

“Heard anything more of your Freda?”

The waiters hustle to bring plates of hot meat,

LONDON NIGHTS

glasses of wine, tankards of beer. Noise surges to the domed ceiling. Life is warm and red-hearted where the cups are flowing, where there is money in the purse, where the flesh is well fed and the pulse beats for new excitement, new sensations.

At midnight, however, the cafés close. The men settle with the waiters, the women file out. They stand in groups in the Circus and discuss plans for the night. Some, with their gallants, go off in cabs. Others go on foot to their clubs—to Gerrard Street, to Dean Street, to Charlotte Street. In these they cheat God and themselves till the small hours. It is what is called technically "pleasure." Men go to such resorts in a spirit of bravado, or for curiosity, or because they are taken by a friend "to see the fun." There must be at least a hundred places of the kind, for they have become much tolerated since the war. The raids upon them receive much publicity, but a raid seems seldom to succeed in closing one of them.

The fact is, immorality has so grown upon us in London that one may say it is becoming national. Why go to Paris "for a good time"? It can be arranged in London just as well. The number of women on the streets is appalling—surely ten times as many as in 1913. Even the children playing in the streets know what the girl on the corner is looking for, and call names at her. The "oldest profession" as it is called, must surely have become a very lean one in London; there is such enormous

competition. Its shame has no longer the added reproach of giving a life of luxury.

These unfortunate women are little molested by the police since the war. They are seldom or never brought to court. They go their way and get their terrible punishment from life itself rather than from a magistrate. Many of them, alas! are the betrayed of the war period. In a few years they will pass. One cannot but wonder whether something in the meantime will not be done to save the equivalent part of the next generation from this shame.

Useful social work in a small way is done by St. Martin's Church at night. The crypt is open to the homeless, and is managed by two women of the W.A.S., one inside, the other on outside duty on the street. The main hope is to be able to save young homeless people from being taken to places of evil repute for the night. The lusts of the great city feed still on the young and the innocent, and scouts are always at large seeking new victims. The young man or young woman at a loose end after midnight often proves their prey, and once dragged into vice they seldom get out again. To such, however, St. Martin's is a sanctuary. The "ever-burning" lamp of hospitality of the church shines for the unhappy, and also, perhaps, as a fitting example to other churches.

There is a strangely beautiful scene in the crypt of St. Martin's at two in the morning, in the low-

LONDON NIGHTS

roofed chapel, men and women of varying degrees of misfortune, huddled on benches, sleeping with their heads on Bibles. *Knock, knock, knock*, upstairs! Some one is knocking at the great door, and wishes admission. It is like the staging of a parable of the Kingdom of Heaven—"Knock, and it shall be opened unto you!" Newcomers slowly step adown the stone stairs to the flagstones and the vaults and the memorial tablets and the little altar; find a bench among the resting-places of the ancient dead. The church, like a fortress, stands above them between their unhappiness and the hungry night. Thus sanctuary is granted by a church, as given in the Middle Ages.

But as dawn light creeps into the sky the sleepers creep forth, and those who seek work make most commonly for the markets. For hours before sunrise there is unpacking of vegetables, fruit and flowers in Covent Garden or Spitalfields, and of baskets of fish at Billingsgate. Flower fragrances cover an acre north of the Strand; the smell of fish closes up Great Tower Street. Smithfield becomes alive, and likewise Leadenhall Market. All the alarums have gone off in the mean homes, and cups of morning tea have been gulped down, night being at an end and the day of toil beginning.

Dawn opens the gates of London. Figuratively, of course, great gates open wide to let in floods of suburban workers. There are the great railway termini. The first black figures emerging on to the hushed pavement of Cannon Street look like

LONDON NIGHTS

departing shadows, but in truth they are not shadows, but the real substance of work-a-day London. The departing shadows give way to multitudes who press on at one another's backs for hours. Who has not marvelled, watching the workmen's trains come in at Liverpool Street, or, standing at one of the bridges, watched the great throngs coming to have another day, test it and try its worth in the midst of the great metropolis.

So night ends. But one returns to it. The glitter of a London afternoon is the promise of its night. Even in rain or in fog a London evening has more poetry in it than a London noontide. The true beauty of the morning belongs to the country. The only exceptions I would make would be in favour of Hyde Park on certain days, or in favour of an Armistice morning when the pallid faces of the many are lifted toward the sky in Whitehall.

I love most of all national occasions in the streets; and of the many nights, election nights haunt the memory longest. That night in the fog in December, 1923, when Labour triumphed; that night of rain and tears in November, 1924, when England turned from Labour.

The night in the fog seemed very characteristic of national destiny. We are living in a great fog, and there are an enormous number of people moving about in it. There is a dreadful poor and a dulled rich. Ignorant armies of politicians are fighting about it, operating machine-guns of facts

LONDON NIGHTS

and statistics, employing smoke screens, poison gas and stink bombs. In the midst of the London night it has become evident. They are fighting for the right to cure our social evils. They will continue to fight, and the evils will not grow less because of the fighting. The night grows darker. The pilot light above Big Ben is out. The great clock tells the hour, but its face is hidden from men. It is cold and wet at Cleopatra's Needle. Bedroom windows light up and anon go dark. The restless and homeless keep walking to and fro on the Embankment.

The river goes on to the sea, whispering to its banks as it flows. Something is passing from us, always passing out of London under the cover of the fog and the night: the inspiration of our youth, the dream of the England which was to be, passing away, and then, of course, renewed from the source. It comes whispering afresh and ineffectually passes on. For London is every city that ever was and ever will be. So at least says Night to one who sits by the river in the midnight hours and is passive to the mystery, the beauty, and the suffering of London.

An Embankment Night

WAITING cars and taxis at the House of Commons; Big Ben supreme ticking off the nation's time from above; the lights o' London dripping their long reflections into the shadowy Thames. 'Tis twelve midnight. Late trams gyrate over Westminster Bridge, and on the Embankment; on the Lambeth side of the river every seat is occupied by a homeless man or woman staring at the water and the Parliament windows all lighted up. The legislators and debaters are still hard at talk.

On the Westminster side in the car shelter a drab all in black has taken her stand for the night. She is in a corner and is fast asleep, standing. You cannot see her face, but a placard above her head invites you to "Fine Paintings in the Tate Gallery." "She's 'ere every night," volunteers a man waiting for a home car. "Drunk, that's what's the matter with 'er. If you or me was in that condition we'd soon find ourselves at the station." The passenger seems angry about it. But he also is drunk, certainly drunk.

Late Londoners are trailing towards bed. Noteworthy are the men and women couples who still walk to the Embankment wall and look down curiously to the river as if thinking of an end of life. There's a woman asleep at Charing Cross. Night-birds prowl up and down. You can tell

AN EMBANKMENT NIGHT

the homeless by the state of their boots. A good bed is a wonderful saver of shoe leather.

A small woman has fallen into a black bundle on half a seat at Waterloo Bridge. Another, drunk, leans against the parapet and makes disgusting noises at passers-by. The latter reply in the same coin. Workmen have started on an all-night job repairing the causeway in front of Cleopatra's Needle. "That's wot the — war 'as done for me," says one loudly to the other. Men like moths stand in front of the vague red coffee-stalls at Charing Cross, at the foot of Savoy Street, and below Somerset House.

Victoria from her granite pedestal below Queen Victoria Street looks to Westminster, but cannot see it very well. She seems shrunken, somehow.

Another late tram, like a greeting come too late, glides empty to Blackfriars. Two o'clock sounds from the great tower, and the chimes are faintly repeated by St. Paul's, by St. Clement's, by St. Martin's, by far-away and unrecognised churches.

Parliament adjourns. There are loud and long and repeated cries for cabs. Electric bells ring for half an hour at the gates of St. Stephen's. A suspicious policeman asks me if I think the bell is ringing for me. But I watch the M. P.'s flock out all jaded and dull, and thinking only of home and bed. Two Labour members adjourn to the coffee-stall facing Westminster Bridge, and a jaded female in blue rolls alongside and jollies them:

LONDON NIGHTS

"Watcher, mates, ain't ye goin' to treat us to-night?"

"What's it going to be?"

"A corn beef sandwich 'd do me all right."

"We ought to see ye home for that."

Every seat on the Lambeth Embankment holds a sleeper. Many men are lying there; few women. The women seem to keep to the north. A policeman comes along and stirs all the snoring or shivering recumbent sleepers. He passes, and they all relapse again. Others feel perished with cold, and walk off a little way, rub their hands, stamp, and return.

I sit beside a young man who is lying sleeping on a divided half-seat, and he keeps muttering: "I can't do it. I say I can't do it." What is his story?—a hopeless quest of honest work, perhaps. He, at least, is not sponging on others. He is bearing his sorrow by himself.

There are not a few youngish men in the dismal fraternity of the Embankment. I notice, however, no young women. I suppose for a sufficient reason, but not because there are no destitute young girls.

Three o'clock. The chimes are clearer and the night seems darker. The Parliament buildings are one magnificent black mass broken only by tiny lights in watchmen's windows. The beacon light on top of Big Ben has gone out. The Hotel Cecil has long since extinguished its sky sign. The black-clothed drab with hat down over her



FLOWERY FACES AT COVENT GARDENS

AN EMBANKMENT NIGHT

face still stands motionless in the car shelter under the Tate Gallery advertisement—she is positively corpse-like. But she sleeps. Most of London sleeps.

It is night, but something of the morning is beginning. Horse-drawn vehicles with sleepy drivers are bringing loads of vegetables over Westminster Bridge, on the way to Covent Garden. Red mail-vans tear over vacant asphalt with heaps of the night's letters. There is a gleaming of dawn light—or is it moonlight?—coming from St. Paul's, and a wan reflection on the new County Hall. The Charing Cross coffee-stall has packed up and wheeled home. But below Waterloo Bridge "Bert" is doing some trade and exchanging many remarks. The cold ones, though without the price of a drink, have gathered round for warmth.

"I 'ad a feller ter night said 'e'd marry me, heugh, heugh, heugh."

"'Ow's that, Sarah?"

"Yers, 'e said so. Said 'e'd marry me after Epsom week, heugh, heugh."

"No, gahn straight, the copper moved me on. 'E wanted somethin', but I 'adn't picked up a penny, far less a shillin'."

"I saw a feller walking along 'ere ter night. I bet 'e 'ad a quid in 'is pocket."

"'E 'ad it, but p'raps 'e wanted it."

A woman with golden hair and big comb hanging out of it behind lurches up. She has a hideous face, and yet open-work stockings and high-heeled

LONDON NIGHTS

shoes. She leans against the coffee-stall and seems either drunk or mad. The little crowd jeers at her for being "outside."

A little way along, opposite the Sphinxes, stand figures of Honour and Justice in the Belgian Memorial group. But they look as if they also were shut out of homes and were seeking to sleep on the Embankment. In a moment you might expect to see them stagger along to the coffee-stall and join the lady with dyed hair.

Up above on Waterloo Bridge at the approach there are more coffee-stalls. On one is written in large letters: NO WOMEN SERVED HERE, BY ORDER.

"Why?" I asked.

"Cos ye can't get rid of them. They stay around all the night."

Poor outcasts! No home, not even a doss-house bed, no hearth, not allowed to lie long on the Embankment seats, banished even from the coffee-stalls!

Nights, however, pass, like life itself. The May dawn comes up rapidly and unexpectedly. At four o'clock, pop, on Parliament Street, out go the lights.

Dawn on Westminster Bridge; the surface of the Thames suffused with silver light; rose exhalations rising from the city. At half-past four broad daylight—launches, barges, tugs, slipping silently but visibly under the bridges. The Houses of

AN EMBANKMENT NIGHT

Parliament, grey and grand and real, ready to lend dignity to our legislators for another day.

The unfortunates stir in their cold seats. Women trapse off to Covent Garden, perchance to pick up flowers. The men slip away as if they feared the light of day. "How was it?" I ask myself, in Wordsworth's day, when here on this very bridge one day at dawn he wrote those beautiful lines:

Dear God! The very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still.

Were there no unfortunates then on the river-side homeless and helpless? Dear, kind God, was it so? I fear the misery was there even then also.

A Tour of the Coffee-stalls

LONDON magistrates sometimes look over their glasses and past those sitting in their fuggy courts to the world beyond. They make those publishable asides which figure in the afternoon papers. One of those which I remember was to the effect that "Coffee-stalls seem to be the resort of the criminal classes." It started a hue and cry in the press, for such is the magic of the word "coffee" that almost anything about coffee-stalls is good copy.

Personally I think that if the criminal classes meet anywhere, why not at a coffee-stall? But whether they are to blame or not, the coffee-stalls remain part of the romance of London at night. Those red-painted shops on wheels which some old horse drags into position every night, are the most cheery and hospitable things in the sombre silence of after-midnight. The rosy glow even of the back of a coffee-stall seen from a distance suggests a happy hearth, a bit of home cut out of a house and set up in the street. Yet it is chiefly the home of the homeless.

The other evening I had been to Pentonville prison talking to some two hundred real criminals, and I decided to have a night out in London and see if there were many faces in the light of coffee-stalls who would look better in Pentonville, and to know what the keepers of the coffee-stalls thought about it all.

A TOUR OF THE COFFEE-STALLS

I visited first that Westminster coffee-stall where the Guards say good-bye to their girls and then hasten along St. George's Street to Birdcage Walk. A laughing little crowd was there, though it was half-past twelve. There was a girl in feathers and frills and an old woman with a very red nose—looked like mother and daughter. There were one or two loungers, an electrician on a night job, and a well-dressed man in a hurry.

"Well, wot you got to say about it, Mr. Man?" said the girl in the feathers.

"Come to this," said he. "They'll make us 'ave a book 'ere and every one sign his name."

"I sign mine with a craws," said Ma.

"Course that taxi-cab murder was all planned in a coffee-house, just over there, 'cross the river. You know the place in —— Street, set back in the wall."

"Oh yers, they was all in the swim, you can bet."

"But they can't close the coffee-stalls."

"I say, you son of a gun, can't you see it's a half-hour I've been waitin', tryin' to get a cup of tea?"

"Say, you're not Irish?"

"What if I am?"

"Can't stan' the Irish. Don't mind English or Scotch or Welsh, but Lord keep off the Irish!"

"An' what are you yourself?"

"I'm Lancashire."

"That'll be a new country. Is it a King you have or a bloody Free State?"

"What's the price of sabs to-night?"

LONDON NIGHTS

"Same's usual."

"Give me a couple o' woods."

"Talking of coffee-stalls, we gets lots of M.P.'s when the supper room is closed over there. We're patronised by royalty, too."

I was much intrigued.

"Why?" I asked. "Does the King send out some one sometimes with a jug?"

"No, but the Prince of Wales uses that coffee-stall at Hyde Park Corner. He came there the other night and stood every one all round whatever they'd like. He says, 'It's all on me. Perhaps one of you'll do the same for me some day when I'm out.'"

A dwarf-like vagrant whose old, weather-beaten face only reached to the ledge of the stall, looked up very approvingly.

"That's ri'," said he hoarsely. "That's the way to carry on. Wish every one was like 'im."

New customers came pushing in. I passed the cigarettes, lit one, passed on. I looked in at the Charing Cross stall, wandered along to the all-night stand on the west side of Trafalgar Square, walked leisurely through Clubland. Hurrying taxis still rushed by as if for double fares. Men in evening dress stood on the curb and bade long adieus to women who were not their wives. Jaded wretches walked slowly alongside the park railings staring on the pavement as they went. Most of the world had gone to bed, and the rest were left out for the night.

A TOUR OF THE COFFEE-STALLS

At about half-past one I reached "Joe's" stand at Hyde Park Corner. Two stalwart policemen stood there on duty; there seemed to me to be a plain-clothes man also at the stall, but there were many customers.

This is probably the most interesting coffee-stall in London. Here quite truly the rich and aristocratic may be seen standing with the "down and out."

Three West End chappies stood there, kidding one another and eating hard-boiled eggs. A fresh-complexioned dandy in full evening dress stood at one side and spoke so faintly and reservedly that only Joe could hear what he said. He leaned forward and breathed a desire for a beef sandwich. A fine specimen of humanity in his way, but his mother's milk was still wet on his lips. A Piccadilly drab "mooched" up and was "chivvied" off. The coffee-stall cats mewed for more milk. A young fellow with a Brigade of Guards tie asked for some Oxo. An obvious Guardee in mufti came and bought a cup of coffee for a wretched-looking young wastrel who stood meekly at the back and waited for it. A rain-washed female came for a "couple of woods."

"Well," said I. "What's this about the Prince of Wales coming here?"

Joe, who had bright reflections on his red cheeks from the gleaming coffee urns and his blazing fire, seemed to jump.

LONDON NIGHTS

"Same line of conversation as last night," said the man I took for a detective.

"They all comes," says Joe, "all sorts. I treat 'em all alike."

"That's a very discreet answer."

"You 'ave ter be sometimes. I'd be all the same if the King 'imself came. I'd give 'im same's I'm givin' you."

"What, the same quality eggs?"

"Yes, and the same shells, and 'e couldn't get better if 'is own chickens laid 'em."

The dandy in evening dress lounged across the stall like a Cecil and stared blankly at the urns.

One of the chappies began to sing, "I plough the fields and sca-atter" as he threw his egg-shells on the pavement. "I—scat—ter—all—right. Don't I?"

Another says, "Give me another of those royal eggs which Edward the Seventh's own chickens laid."

"Here comes a chicken, no, not a chicken. Say, Archie, I begin to feel rather loopy, don't you?"

"Could you tell me—no, wait a minute, yes, that's it. Could you tell me if this is, or on the other hand is not, called sometimes, the 'West-End Eccentrics' Club'?"

"No, this," says Joe, "is the Hotel de Poosh-along."

A huge van drew up, and the driver called out to ask the way to Stratford. The dandy thanked

A TOUR OF THE COFFEE-STALLS

the stall-keeper and walked off. New people came; others went.

I wandered along the gloomy front of Park Lane, and all the blank windows stared at the Park. Scarcely a light anywhere. At the Marble Arch at two a.m., nothing doing. No coffee-stall there now. There used to be one there in the days of the war, and a queer place it was, standing between the Park and the life of Edgware Road.

Fred, in Oxford Street, thinks the stall at Hyde Park Corner may be closed—"too much trouble."

"It's a good pitch, too. Like the Marble Arch stall. I reckon that was the best pitch in London. But you couldn't keep the women off. Soldiers was always startin' fights there. I believe the other feller's 'ad a warning. I'd take it if I was 'im."

Fred had a few jaded customers, men on night jobs mostly. He discoursed on Derby Day. What a time they would have on the road; all the coffee-stalls of London drawn by nags and mokes, jamming the roadway in places. "See them on Bayswater Road!" Fred did not think London could get on without its coffee-stalls. "There will always be some gets into trouble," said he, "but why punish all because of a few?"

I agreed.

My last drink was at the shining resort of Oxford Circus, kept by Mr. Cole, a merry old soul. I had heard a lot about him, for coffee-stall keepers are great gossipers.

"Never touch him," they said. "You see, he's a borough councillor. Yes, Mr. Councillor Cole, that's what they call him."

But Mr. Cole, like the rest, was clearly doing a service in the dim grey hours in the great heartless city. I cannot say I saw any one who looked like a criminal all night. I am all for the coffee-stalls. And as for the magistrate, let him leave his warm bed and do a night's round, and—as they say in Scotland—"save his breath to cool his porridge."

CHAPTER 4

Covent Garden at Dawn

THREE o'clock in the morning, and three old women in black lying asleep on the white steps of St. Martin's Theatre like three robots. It is peaceful and dark in Long Acre, dark but not peaceful in King Street. Creaking vans laden with vegetables and fruit come up from the Strand, and the loud voices of drivers and porters come bawling along the shuttered streets.

I am walking to Covent Garden, and arrive very quickly at the portico of St. Paul's Church, with its tall pillars and its all-night stall, and its stacks of bushel baskets and barrels. In monstrous dark shapes stand hundreds of vans, some with twenty-foot columns of fruit hampers, looking like skyscraper caravans or high houses on wheels.

The horses contentedly nudge one another, the white steam of light traction engines curls and hisses in the darkness. The police walk to and fro watchfully. Drivers stand at the coffee-stalls and eat saveloys, and a swarm of homeless night-birds and drabs prowl about the church front, and as it is the night after Alexandra Day every ragamuffin there has found a rose. There is something weird and haunting in the sight of a score of these creatures who once were men and women wearing bright pink artificial roses.

On the pavement, however, a little further on, lies a huddled figure beside a rusty, ruined wreath,

LONDON NIGHTS

and she sleeps in the dirt—as it were a living death.

“Nah then, fairy!” says one of the vigilant policemen, and shakes her by the shoulder. “Move yerself. Can’t sleep here!”

The fairy raises her haggard face and half-bald head, and I see that she also is wearing one of Queen Alexandra’s roses, for the hospitals, or for luck, or just because it is a rose that does not wither.

But what is it that is coming to me on the night air? How strange! Something has become soft in that squally north-west wind. North-west has changed to south—charged with real rose odours. It is flowers, flowers, flowers, removing vans of flowers, whole gardens on wheels changing their address to Covent Garden. Flowers in pots, flowers in boxes, flowers in crates.

Horses, with a gay splatter of hoofs, came prancing up Southampton Street with carts and light burdens of flowers. Floral Street is floral; all Covent Garden is floral.

But what activity there is in the darkness, in the electric light, all the way round the great glass-topped palace of vegetables, fruit and flowers. Mr. Wood, from the Heathwood Arms, Swanley, has come with sacks of potatoes. Acacias in tubs to be put outside restaurant doors are being solemnly lifted from cart to warehouse. Innumerable pots of scarlet geraniums are being lifted in.

Here comes a huge van just arrived from South-



“AH THEN, FAIRY, GET A MOVE ON!”

COVENT GARDEN AT DAWN

ampton with a thousand cubic feet of strawberries—strawberries from Guernsey or France in neat baskets, prime strawberries in thousands of baskets.

“Hundred and seven, hundred and eight, hundred and nine . . .” some one counts. Porters pass with as many as six bushel baskets on their heads, and their faces are unconcerned under these marvellous hats. Men with hand-barrows plunge among them, but no porter loses the balance of his basket hats.

The café bar within the portico of the Tavistock Hotel is a great sight. It is packed with people. A notice above the counter tells them, “Nothing but the finest margarine is spread on bread in this establishment,” and every one seems to be content. Here wait several women buyers, some hawkers, and a miscellany of drivers and porters.

Cases of greens from Pine House, Isleworth, and crates of cauliflower stand outside, and framework motor cars, stuffed with cabbages, market-gardeners’ vans from Gunnersbury, Chiswick, Kew, Southall, Feltham, shoot into position for discharging their cargo. King Street, James Street, Russell Street, Tavistock Street, are all glutted with waiting vans, and still new ones come.

“Whatcher, Bill, got ’er unloaded yet?”

“’Bout arf.”

“What’s on it?”

“Pack of onions, perhaps five dozen gross cases oranges . . .”

LONDON NIGHTS

Suddenly all the street lights go out—the L.C.C.'s signal that it is dawn. But it seems unconscionably dark yet for morning. Still, the man who switched off the lights o' London at that moment was right, for all the sparrows are chirping merrily at the entrance to Maiden Lane and in the height of the Market Building.

The work of unpacking the goods and exhibiting them goes on apace. I watched the first heap of black currants turned out into the Covent Garden twilight. "Seventeen bob," said the man knowingly.

I saw green peas emptied into giant-size enamelled pans, and then the exposure of carefully-packed little carrots, like innumerable yellow children in a green bed. Grapes unnumbered began to be handed out, selected clusters of purple or green, each in its grape basket. Then brown, aromatic-looking pineapples saw light, sixteen to a box.

Out come bundles of horse-radish, rough and dirty; bundles of delicate asparagus packed in soft straw; market bundles of spring rhubarb in square piles on the cobbled road.

At five o'clock the Covent Garden public-houses are unbarred, and they have a notice exhibited: "Open from 5 a.m. till 9 a.m." That is the real time of the activity of the market, and beer flows readily to men and women with fruity or vegetable-reflecting faces in the Nag's Head, the White Lion, and other noted bars. There is a

COVENT GARDEN AT DAWN

great similarity in the faces of the Covent Gardenites—a sort of Covent Garden jaw and mouth, and a sameness about the muscles of their shoulders and backs. They all do the same sort of Sandow exercises—with baskets and barrows.

Dawn light pours into the cloudy sky, and rain-drops filter on to the increasing crowds of men and women in the streets. Buyers are hurrying in from all parts. Caterers with empty vans come alongside, and neatly-dressed men in grey felt hats and good overcoats come out with notebook and pencil and commence to buy—for Whiteley's, for Slater's, for the great hotels, for the restaurants, for the department stores, for the flower-shops.

In the early-morning light the flowers waiting on the roadways look more natural, as if they were once more growing in that convent garden which used to be here and gave its name to the market. The sparrows are very happy about it, and chirp noisily. One cock-sparrow on a heap of spring onions in Russell Street calls to his mate flirting amid the punnets of cress.

The clock of St. Paul's Church says half-past five with its golden hands. In the rooms of the hotels overlooking the market people are sleeping in old-fashioned beds. The clamour down below must mean nothing to them, or they would not stay in Covent Garden. All London sleeps on every hand all around the mart of flowers and fruit.

In full daylight the flower-market presents the most wonderful sight of all. All the flowers of

LONDON NIGHTS

the flower-shops of London and of the flower-girls of the circuses, gathered together as yet undistributed. Hydrangeas, like wistful white birds, stand waiting on perches. As at many altars stand giant clusters, armfuls, serried ranks of 'Arum lilies, perfuming the air from their bright white trumpets; purple and yellow irises are in a plenty, which suggests an emperor's purchase. The intense and lordly blues of cornflowers start from their boxes; dangling voluptuousness of scarlet carnations hangs from the heights of stalls.

Here are roses; cut roses, delicate, fresh and fragile, only a few hours removed from parent bushes where they grew; here is a miracle of pink poppies, how packed and preserved I cannot guess; here are pansies as thick as in a pansy bed in the park, pansies and candytuft in boxes; here are light-pink geraniums and pelargoniums; and here gorgeous fuchsias drooping Oriental scarlet into the morning light.

I stand in front of a fuchsia almost as tall as myself. It was grown at Potter's Bar under glass and will be bought for some rich man's garden. But it only costs "seven and a tanner" here. Only seven and six, and you can take that loveliness away with you!

Six in the morning—real morning now. People who think they have got up early are beginning to appear. A young Jewess in front of me is buying all manner of flowers. Crowds of costers are on the scene, ready to take cheaper lots when the time

COVENT GARDEN AT DAWN

comes. Business flourishes. I decide to turn in for a few hours' sleep. Home again, therefore, the same way as I came!

St. Martin's Theatre once more, and the same three women in black lying there asleep on the front steps. How strange, pathetic, terrible, and yet beautiful is the life of London, with its workers and its outcasts and its flowers. Our England is a garden—a Covent Garden.

A Doss-house Night

I HOLD that if one would understand our human society aright one must begin one's study, not at the top, but at the bottom. The key to the nine-tenths is possessed by the submerged tenth. Hence the midnight wanderings, this two-o'clock-in-the-morning courage which for the time being has possessed me.

Human beings seem to be most easily classified by their beds, by the places where they sleep. The lowest down, the most unhappy wretches of all, sleep in hospitals and infirmaries. Those who sit all night on the Embankment benches or lie huddled on theatre steps, or even stretch themselves on the deserted pavement of back alleys, are a cut above the worst. There comes a point in the history of broken-down men and women when physical weakness and disease make them incapable of moving on at the policeman's urging.

Many of the outcasts, it must be said, are the victims of drink. They earn their shilling during the day, or even more, but cannot resist buying beer with it. It is a truism to say that if there were fewer public-houses there would be fewer homeless.

It costs but eightpence to get a bed at a doss-house. And the beggar or casual worker feels an honest pride when he hands over his greasy coppers at night and gets a bed and a roof and a good fire. To sleep in a common lodging-house seems

A DOSS-HOUSE NIGHT

terrible to those who have even one mean room of their own in a squalid slum. But it is the acme of respectability among the off-scourings of the London streets. In vain the comedians make jokes at the expense of Rowton houses. There are worse halting places in the life of the poor.

I spent my first night in a London doss-house just to see what it was like with my own eyes. It was down at West India Docks. I visited some others afterwards, but I confess at my first I felt shy. I had recently parted with my worst suit to a man who was down and out, and I found some difficulty in making myself look sufficiently "rough." An old cardigan and foreign coat helped most. But it was difficult to get hands and face to look really dirty. As I surveyed the effect in the glass, and rumpled my hair to make it look as if I had never brushed it in my life, I saw that the most I had done was to make myself look like a swagger burglar, decidedly a "crook" and one who had never done a day's hard work in his life. This was not too good.

But a worse difficulty was in myself—my confident walk. How get the furtive look, the look of one watched by the police? I did my best, and I noticed that the polite public in the omnibus kept staring distrustfully at me.

In Whitechapel, however, I was more at home, and costers very readily showed me the way when I had missed it. Dust blew in my eyes as I walked. I rubbed my shiny hands in the gutter

LONDON NIGHTS

of the roadway and felt more dirty and at home. I felt the East End taking me to itself as I threaded my way through innumerable mean streets. I had a glass of beer in a Limehouse public-house, and watched beer-sodden women lifting their skirts and dancing to the strains of a concertina. I passed a Gold Flake to a bruiser, who was sizing me up with his eyes.

As long as twilight lingered I loafed around the public-houses. I stood and stared at the steamers in dock. Then when dark had surely covered all, and made our outlines indistinct, I made for my chosen night-house, planked down eightpence at the booking-window and was passed in. Out of a drab slum street, as if by magic, I passed into an entirely different scene, a vast kitchen bigger than any barrack-room I have seen, lit up by electric light, but also by a huge flaming furnace of red-hot coal. It was a chilly unseasonable summer night, but this fire made the room like a smelting works.

There were some dozens of rough wooden tables with benches, and on the benches all the doss-house crowd smoking, playing cards, or talking, some singing, some snoring, some gulping tea which they had made for themselves beside the great fire. All around on every wall hung old coats, the seediest-looking coats in London, and on the coats the seediest of old caps. Every lodger had a cap; not one that I saw had a hat.

I had, however, hardly come in when an attend-

A DOSS-HOUSE NIGHT

ant, ex-sergeant-major style, came stamping in, bellowing a mass of indistinguishable sounds. I believe it was "Closing time! Those as 'asn't paid must pay now."

Several men mooched up to him, paid him some coppers, and got a bed ticket in return. In this kitchen were a whole crowd who hadn't the price of a bed or else had merely come in to see a friend or get warm.

I went up to my bed in a huge dormitory, where thirty or forty men were already stretched on little beds and covered with red cotton blankets. What beds! Clean enough, of course, but meant for four-foot men. Clean sheets, everything very clean. Floors as clean as a new pin. Fancy clean sheets when a laundry charges us a shilling for washing a pair of them! The doss-house lodgers lay in their beds and smoked clay pipes and read their evening papers by the never-extinguished electric light. Others grunted; others snored. Nobody spoke to his neighbour.

I noticed there were more midle-aged and old men than young ones. They slept stark naked, with their clothes under their pillow. When I had "got down to it" I watched others come in and take their beds. The reason some of them slept naked may have been because they had no underclothes. One explained to me afterwards that they did not sleep in their clothes because they did not wish to gather insects from the beds. Another said he did not wish to wear out his shirt

LONDON NIGHTS

sleeping in it. Few men came in with bags or parcels. Some, it is true, slept with their clothes on. All removed their boots.

I could not help feeling what a lot of animals men tend to become when herded together without homes, wives, children. That pregnant silence of the doss-house seemed to speak a complete self-sufficiency and detachment. There was no delicacy, no shame, but, instead, a natural matter-of-factness, as of the behaviour of horses in stables.

All had had homes somewhere; many, no doubt, had wives somewhere, children, too. But they slept at the Down-and-Out Club, completely cut off. No one even takes the names of those who sleep at such places. Who I was or what I was not one man in that great throng troubled his mind to think.

It was a long night; men came in at eleven, at twelve, at one; a seaman in squeaky boots entered, a blind man came tapping with his stick, an old invalid came in coughing and spluttering. All sat on their beds and undressed, and eventually snored or talked in their sleep. At five in the morning one of the attendants came and looked at every man's face and counted the sleepers, apparently to make sure that no one had got in without paying. At six the sleepers awoke and laboriously began to put on trousers and old boots.

I did not stay long after that, but picked up my things and made for the wash-house, where I borrowed a bit of soap and had a good wash. The

A DOSS-HOUSE NIGHT

kitchen at seven was a great sight; that huge furnace burning, and all manner of men standing about in the light of it, smoking clay pipes. Most of the lodgers were regular habitués. They lived at the place. It was their "Cecil" or "Ritz." They had old rusty-looking syrup tins, with packets of tea and sugar, and they had their bread and margarine, their tinned salmon. They stood their kettles and pots in the glare of the fire, and nursed their thick cups on the rough wooden tables.

In the morning light the men eyed me more suspiciously.

"Don't need to tell us yer a stranger," said one.

"Dahn from Scotland Yard," said another.

"No criminals 'ere, matey," said a third. "Too much light. Ye'll find one, though, at the top of the Blackwall Steps—always there."

"Oh, I'm nothing to do with the police," said I, with a laugh. "I only came in to see what it's like."

They grunted and their interest in me faded. I went out. So passed my first night in a London doss-house.

*In the Crypt of St. Martin's**Trafalgar Square*

IT was one of the hottest nights of the week in London. Men and women had taken chairs out of their houses on to the pavements and sat in them long after midnight. People deserted their homes to sleep beside the fountains of Trafalgar Square. Some lay on the parapet of the pool, boots on, heads hanging over the water, with fear of tumbling in.

Twelve men lay sleeping at the feet of Gordon, down-and-outs. Embankment tramps, some of them, but one man had come there on a bicycle and slept there by his machine. The stuffy doss-houses at least were emptied of their nightly visitors, for all sought the open air and coolness. I, for my part, went to St. Martin's Church and spent an hour in the crypt. I think it was the coolest place in London.

Every Londoner now knows the red lamp of St. Martin's Church, burning under the portico at the top of the steps, like a doctor's lamp—the lamp of the doctor of souls. That lamp is not, however, the lamp of the doctor, but of home.

"Dick" Sheppard, when he took over St. Martin's in the first December of the war, conceived the idea of making a church feel like home. And as a token of hospitality he arranged that the doors of the church should stand open all night

IN THE CRYPT OF ST. MARTIN'S

as well as all day, and any one might come in who would. St. Martin's became a soldiers' shrine and a home of the homeless. Many a fighting man spent his last hours in Blighty in that church, in full accoutrement, hurrying to the troop train at Victoria before dawn. Sheppard captured Trafalgar Square from the street-walkers and the "Reds." It became the Square of his church.

It is perhaps hardly necessary to tell the story of the innovations of St. Martin's, its inauguration of lay speakers (I myself have given a sermon twice in St. Martin's), its choral and dramatic successes, its novel parish-magazine, the "St. Martin's Review," which circulates in several thousands and goes, I believe, to all parts of the world. But the things which struck the imagination of London most were the ever-burning lamp and the nightly hospitality.

In 1919, 1920, 1921, the church was a common resort of the ex-service man out of a job, and now I am told the visitors are more general and are drawn from every class of society. It has been found more convenient to shut the main body of the church and open the crypt instead. Any night, if you find yourself stranded, go and knock, as I did, at the door of the crypt and go down into the still and quiet depth of the building, and there you will find a bench on which to lie down, a hassock for a pillow, and the light of the chapel and its altar for your moon and stars.

Two women of the W.A.S. are on duty, one

LONDON NIGHTS

inside, the other on the streets in the neighbourhood. The outside one watches for cases of distress and brings in any who seem in need of shelter. She told me how the other night she rescued a young girl from white-slavers who endeavoured to get the girl out of the crypt after she had been brought in. The policewoman, however, blew her whistle, and they made off with great alacrity. Another night, too, a taxi-driver discovered a girl attempting to commit suicide in one of the parks and brought her to the church.

Both men and women are taken in. But the point of view is that they must be people genuinely in distress, not rich-curious come to see, nor, on the other hand, habitual vagrants. The place has suffered considerably through parties of fashionable people straying in in the small hours of the morning, ladies wearing their pearls, men in evening-dress wanting to distribute shillings. Such visits are resented by genuine unfortunates, while, of course, if it got about that money was given, all sorts of undesirables would come.

The tall and very friendly woman-officer quite thought I was "down-and-out" until I explained. I soon realized that there were as many well-dressed as ill-dressed visitors. I passed down the stone steps out of the hot, twice-breathed air of Trafalgar Square into a deliciously cool chapel. With me there was a young fellow who said he had been too late to get a bed at the Y.M.C.A.

IN THE CRYPT OF ST. MARTIN'S

He looked at me with an air of congratulation, and whispered: "Isn't it cool?"

He took his bench, made a pillow of a Bible and a hassock, stretched himself out full length, and said not another word. Soon I heard him breathing regularly in sleep. You can tell the poverty of people by the state of their boots. Well, he had a loose rubber heel on one of his boots and none on the other.

I sat down at the back, beside the memorial tablet of the baptism of Sir Francis Bacon. Three seats in front I saw a pair of long white gloves hanging to the floor and the huddled form of an unfortunate lady. In front of me a bald-headed man slept or meditated with his head on his hands.

It was very still and strange and quiet. One could hear the roar of passing taxi-cabs scarring the surface of silence. The pillars were square and white; white the low, vaulted roof. Men and women slept as in a doss-house, but it was not the doss-house atmosphere. It was church, the place of penitence and prayer.

The place reminded me most of the shady, white-walled interior of the monastery of St. Guerassim near the Dead Sea, into which with many pilgrims I once walked—out of dazzling heat into the shelter and coolness of a great rock.

Silence grew with the early morning, and in that silence ever and anon there was a knocking,

LONDON NIGHTS

and in answer to the knocks the tall W.A.S. would go above, unlock the door, and parley with the would-be lodger. She had no cause to refuse any one that I heard. Down the stairs they came, hat in hand, and were ushered to a pew of silence and rest.

One dandy could not cash a cheque, another had been cleaned out at a club, but the rest were of quiet and poor exterior. They came, and they found sanctuary.

They quietly took their places and lay and stared at the flag-stones of the floor with their antique inscriptions, loose flags which used to cover the dead, now disinterred. And the wakeful, no doubt, looked distrustfully at the old whipping-post, much scarred with leather, or mused on the fame of the men whose memorials stand around. Most, no doubt, saw nothing strange and felt nothing new. But at six in the morning they were given a new day and walked up those stone steps with St. Martin's refreshment in their hearts.

CHAPTER 7

At the Settles Street Shelter

Whitechapel

THE lean-to couples watch the screen; he with cigarette behind ear, she with her hand in his. The unromantic are surging to the bar of the "Prince of Hesse." The still less romantic are eating *Wurst* at places where it says UZHINI PO UMERENIM TSENA, which is a recognisable language on the Whitechapel Road. The lights of other establishments glimmer wanly upon the Barbican Mission to the Jews. A Jewish audience listens to Jewish drama at its theatre opposite. Christians, however, swarm in the crypt of St. Augustine's, where Church members are playing "St. Agnes," and they will presently debouch upon a slum street led by an Anglican Father wearing a biretta. Opposite, in profound shadow, is the "White House," looking like a black house—a shelter for the homeless and penniless. Whitechapel and Stepney are wide awake, but the footsore wanderers of East London make their way betimes to the Settles Street shelter, there to rest old and weary limbs.

At the "Hop-Pole" round the corner the hoppers are dancing and singing. You must have done one season's hopping to belong to the Club. They hop and they hop. A stone's throw away, the girls of Flower and Dean Street go in and out of a caravanserai much missionised by the Fathers

LONDON NIGHTS

of St. Augustine's. Some way further still lies the great block of the London Hospital with all its beds and its suffering and its care. But, as a fourth comparison, let us look in at the Lady Chapel of the church in Settles Street. There, in utter devotion, even prostrate, worship certain women, late into the night, a living altar of piety. It is strange to relate them to the ever-rolling parade of humanity upon the broad pavements of Whitechapel Road. There are singing and laughing and weeping and praying all going on at the same time.

At midnight Whitechapel is still full of life and many shop-fronts are illuminated. Some are open until one in the morning. There is a rush to a little tobacconist's at twelve, and a queueing up for cigarettes. Such is the mysterious ruling of the law, the shopkeeper may not sell tobacco between eight and twelve, but at midnight he is free to do so again. But he remains open all the time—chiefly, apparently, for conversation.

Towards one a.m. sleep settles down upon the great highway. The people in the little streets have been asleep for hours. I meet a policeman and we converse. "Lots of people sleeping out," says he, "in doorways chiefly, and very old. We have to move them on when we see them. You see, they might die on some one's doorstep. That wouldn't be nice, would it? Fancy coming down for the milk in the morning and finding some one

THE SETTLES STREET SHELTER

dead on the doorstep! Then we constables don't like mortuary cases anyway."

The constable wished there were more places like the White House where men and women could find shelter, especially on cold and wet nights. This was a curious matter to me, for I know some magistrates favour the closing of this free shelter, their opinion being that it may afford a hiding place upon occasion for dangerous criminals. The L.C.C. also would like to have it shut up.

However, it is a well-used institution. There are more down-and-outs there than in the crypt of St. Martin's in Trafalgar Square. But they are mostly of a more hopeless class. The Fathers of St. Augustine's look after the shelter, and it has a "vice-Lord Chancellor." One amusing aspect of the shelter is that it is divided into a House of Commons and a House of Lords. It encourages habitués, and when one has proved himself to be a decent fellow he is eligible for promotion to the House of Lords, a smaller and more cosy chamber. From the House of Lords it is possible to go a stage further and be given a private room.

Up to about eleven o'clock the men sit and gossip and read papers at the tables, discuss horses, discuss adventures of their day. Then comes the time when they "get down to it." There is a huge glowing fire, and it is as warm as one could wish. The lights go out and the sleepers make them-

selves comfortable by firelight. At midnight all are still as if petrified, snores mingle, and the interior of the House of Commons presents a romantic spectacle. I have not seen upon the stage a scene so theatrical. Most of the men sleep in sitting positions with their heads fallen on the tables; some sleep with coats over their heads; a dozen or so have crept under forms and sleep there, crouching with nose to wall; others wrap themselves round with straw matting and lie thus on the floor. No one under sixty is supposed to be there—but there are in fact many younger men.

There is an altar, there are religious and sporting pictures; Christ—and King Edward. There is an emblazoned scroll, in the House of Lords, from Browning: *One who never turned his back but marched breast forward*, and the rest.

So at one, at two in the morning, all the East End sleeps, each has his place. But later, in the bright hour after dawn, the sleepers of Settles Street wake to bread-and-butter and cocoa, and then go forth North, South, East and West in quest of that unobtainable thing—work.

The Fires of Smithfield

IT is four i' the morning. London lies in pools after a rainy yesterday, but the clouds are passing from the sky and a north-east wind is spreading a carpet of frost ferns on the surface of Holborn. The streets are empty except for morning newspaper vans speeding upward from Shoe Lane. You clank along with echoing boot-falls toward the City, and only as you look down from Holborn Viaduct or from the top of Charterhouse Street do you see the blare of Smithfield lights and the mingled steams of the many traction engines that have brought up the meat vans from the docks. It is a great sight to see the many traction engines steaming in the night air, and coupled vans behind them like petty goods trains.

Where in 1553 the flames lit up the bright anguished faces of the Christian martyrs, where the black square of St. Bartholomew's Church is stencilled upon the sky, where the patients of a great hospital sleep in their cribs—the lights of London gleam at four, at five in the morning, upon a great and busy throng. They are the buyers and sellers and market clerks and dealers and porters and haulers of meat. The fires of Smithfield still blaze but do not burn, showing in a ruby light the faces of the butchers and the flanks of the carcasses they sell.

A man in a white smock that looks like a night-dress is wheeling an exaggerated perambulator

LONDON NIGHTS

with six stiff frozen pigs in it, across the moonlit stones of Smithfield. You are in bed, driving, perchance, *your* pigs to market, but he, like a sleep-walker, is pushing his in a hand-barrow. And there, in front of him, besieged on every hand with vans, stands the vast market with all doors open and all lights burning. The day's issue of meat for London's hosts is being put in the rations.

The porters, in white aprons or smocks, wear what is called locally "canaries" or meat capes; these are shoulder-pieces of yellow leather, on which they carry the meat when unloading it.

The meat-vans are camouflaged by huge advertisements of something other than meat—Quaker Oats, Richmond Gem, Cherry Blossom Polish—and when the vans move forward into position they are like little moving hoardings. One name in big letters such as FAIRCLOUGH or CORNELL on a van tells you the true freight.

The sides of some vans go out, or the backs fall down, or canvas blinds roll up, and you see twelve mighty quarters suspended from the van roof, or red carcasses sleeping on straw, or absurd-looking stiff white frozen pigs. The porters carry them forth, and it is even amusing to see the little white pigs, like pigs on wings, rushed from the dark roadway to the hooks in the lighted avenues of the vast spacious central market.

The Smithfield porters work by piece-rate and therefore unload the carcasses on the run. They, like the fish porters of Billingsgate, are a race

THE FIRES OF SMITHFIELD

apart. No women invade the scene of their duties. Handling the meat seems in the first instance to be entirely a man's job. Even in the retail business the woman butcher is a rarity. Women wrap the meat; they hand you your dank change, but do not operate with choppers and hooks. At Smithfield the rubicund workers look as if they belonged to a sacred order. I think the short yellow capes on their shoulders give them an especially priestly air. I saw one who, almost without "make-up," might have gone on the stage as a Cardinal. Where the bishops burned to justify the Pope, simulacra of bishops handle meat to this day. Nevertheless, there is a strange feeling of irrelevance about the meat-market. Ridley lit the candle of the ideal in England—"a candle which should never be put out"—and we buy and sell meat at the place of those strange fires. Oh, the roast beef of old England, and oh, that old English roast beef!

It is a great scene within the market. Stall-keepers vie with one another in smartness and cleanness. In the flood of electric light and glamour of standing flesh the police look like wax-works, and the dealers look like part of a *tableau vivant*. Above each booth stands the name of the dealer, and below his sign his goods grow before the eyes as the porters bring them in from the vans. In comes New Zealand lamb, Argentine beef, Dutch pork, sides of beef from Denmark, Armour's quarters. There are luscious brown sides of bacon

that one could almost bite at as one passed ; there is the sweet pink pork with lazy-looking bone. There are hares and ducks and turkeys looking scared to be dead in the presence of larger animals. There are neatly-sawn exposures of ribs. There are slabs of liver. The eye takes in scores of sheep carcasses ranged in rows with a military precision. How unlike their behaviour when alive ! But the greatest show is that of the beef.

It bulges with strength, yet is draped as a bride. Prodigious and ponderous, mantled with suet, the quarters look like engines or guns, like a sort of howitzer that will shoot life and vim into a race.

Meat-eaters are meat-begetters, and one saw hung up in Smithfield the making of the next generation of Londoners. I saw ourselves to-morrow. We are going to put that vast array of vivid flesh with all its vitamins into ourselves.

The great names in the market seem to be Bonser, Birchnal, Hannah Ward, Dodge and Reynolds ; the Yankee Morris, the Dutch importer Swanieber, Currie the Swiss importer, Archer, Spanger. A good name of poultry handlers is Keevil and Keevil. You see some great sights at the big merchants' stalls when large consignments come in. For instance, this Monday, thirty tons of Dutch offal appeared. You had but to open the door of a van when out flew ox-kidneys, sheeps' kidneys, hearts, livers, all mixed up. Very clean, but all higgledy-piggledy. All the meat that comes from Holland has a reputation of being

THE FIRES OF SMITHFIELD

unusually clean. Dutch calves and lambs seem to come over in exceptionally good condition.

There is meat from all parts of the world, even Chinese pigs upon occasion, and in the autumn a good deal of reindeer venison from northern Norway and Lapland. The quality of meat seems judged by its brightness. No one cares to deal in dull-looking carcasses. It is the life in the meat that gives it that radiant, enticing appearance which butchers love. There is clearly a professional pride at Smithfield.

As usual, however, if you wish contrasts you will find them in the cafés and public-houses around the market square. At Goodfare's or "The Cock" all sorts of people mix. There is the smart white-aproned inside porter with scrubbed "canaries," and there is the outside one in blue smock, bespattered and ragged, with rancid sacking on shoulder. There is the black-faced locoman grasping with sooty hands his double-size mug of tea. All have tousled hair. Even the market butchers have greasy hair. There is a roar of bad language in "The Cock," mixed with "'Allo, Bill" and "Wotcher, Fred." One hulk-like man looks like a hunk of beef, and he is talking to a typical group of costers with pale, weedy faces and mouse-tail moustaches.

As I munched a sandwich a stranger looked up into my eyes and remarked: "It's all got to be shifted, ain't it?"

LONDON NIGHTS

I don't know whether he referred to my sandwich or to van-loads of bacon.

A man who had been at the market every night for thirty-five years told me times were not what they were. "So many firms 'as opened local markets in places like Peterborough, and moves the meat there straight from the ship, sells it at same price as 'ere. We used to 'ave 'arf the butchers of England coming up to buy two or three times a week. Friday and Saturday used to be the rush times for meat, but not now. Monday mornin' is the best day."

"When do you knock off?"

"Nine o'clock."

"Do you know where the martyrs were burned?"

"Oh, yes, I often goes there on Sat'day afternoons, just to look at it; pretty plice, very pretty."

A man munching saveloys tacitly agreed. He was about to say something, but stuck his nose in his beer mug, and then, stamping and expectorating, pushed his way out to the market again.

At six-thirty the first woman appeared, bringing some hot grub for a husband—evidently the model wife. But the men seemed to stare at her as if at a rare bird. At a quarter to seven I started back home. Dawn light was filtering into the dark sky, making it one vast, even, Chinese blue. I walked away from the arc lamps and the crimson shadows, upward to the Viaduct, and when I reached Holborn it was morning, but it was as

THE FIRES OF SMITHFIELD

empty as before. A tram all lighted up looked like a strange lantern at the top of Gray's Inn Road.

My impression of Smithfield at night gave way to something unforgettable at Holborn Bars. It was zero hour once more for the Royal Fusilier there on the monument. As the shadow fled he seemed to come to life, his metal hat never so realistic, the silhouette of his rifle and bayonet veritably swaying with him "on the alert."

"He will be over the top in a moment," I thought, "into the No-man's-land of Gray's Inn Road."

The first fires of East London lifted their human incense into a pure dawn. Silver became opal, but all the petty towers and corner-bits of offices became falsely grand in relief against the morning. The East became a great altar with many smokes. The West was sombre, and slept.

Old men with barrows of gravel began the day scattering small stones on the broad highway.

A Night That Ended at Billingsgate

THERE were three of us, and we set out in a car to explore the East End of London after midnight: there were Frank Morley and myself and—let us call her Claribel. The weather was intermittently wet—not promising to be fair. We skidded twice, jumping on to a refuge at the top of Kingsway, making a turn of two hundred degrees right across the deserted approaches of the Old Bailey. Along the wet and slippery highways of Commercial Road and East India Dock we motored cautiously. Frank and I sat in front; the lady, in furs and blankets, behind, ready for any adventure. We saw the lights of Limehouse and Poplar go out and the last late home-goers slinking into alleys and courts. We came up to the great dock gates and slipped downward by the so-called Blackwall Stairs, down to the tunnel which goes under the Thames, the white-walled, glimmering, deserted Blackwall Tunnel—rumbling and crashing and echoing along this strange roadway which goes under the dank mud-banks and dark flowing waters of the broadening Thames.

Thus we emerged into North Kent, on to Arsenal Road, and we drove to the centre of Woolwich and to that Beresford Square which, in its waking hours, is impassably packed with hawkers and buyers and all kinds of drab and poor humanity. But Night had cleared it. It was

A NIGHT AT BILLINGSGATE

calm and spacious; still as a ruin in the wilderness. Its one policeman stood still as a waxwork. The radiant town clock with its pointers at ten minutes to one was a celestial luminary as untroubled with humanity as the moon itself. All the mob of the square had gone to its beds: but there was one living and glowing thing, a sort of fairy-tale house, in a corner, a night coffee-stall, and there two old watchmen had come from their posts of duty and were confabulating together over cups of coffee, and a late artilleryman joined them and asked for "a packet of woods."

We alighted, and they stared at us; they ceased talking. We asked for saveloys and tea and a sandwich. We talked of Stevie, the half-witted boy who was blown to bits near Greenwich Observatory in Conrad's "Secret Agent"; we said we'd go there. Yes, two men with caps drawn over their brows and a woman in a Russian *shuba* at one in the morning in Beresford Square talking of some one blown to bits! What did it mean? The watchmen looked at us with that due loathing of crime which is the birthright of poor honest men who see strange things while others sleep.

"Well, cheerio, Joe, and thanks for the saveloys! Prime!"

We rolled away from Woolwich, back the way we came, but turning eventually into Greenwich. Still it rained, with intermission. We stopped the car outside the Royal Naval College and walked forth in the drizzle to look at the public buildings

through the railings. We talked of Conrad's terrible shocker and the anarchist's design to outrage science by blowing up the Observatory. We spent half an hour in this dead and silent suburb. But it began to rain more heavily, and Fate had arranged that we should have a real night out—no mere curious idleness, but a taste of the life of the homeless.

When we returned to the waiting car we found we could not start it. Nothing our combined wits or knowledge could devise could get one puff out of the engine. We spent an hour on its red inside with theories and spanners, diagnoses and screw-drivers. We wound it up, we switched it, unswitched it. Claribel climbed into it and settled down to sleep, and two bad mechanics stood beside an open bonnet and a fast-cooling radiator and scratched their heads. No all-night garages in Greenwich! There was nothing for it but to proceed on foot. Claribel demurred. She had rather rest in the car than trudge in the rain. We bade her sleep well and promised to bring back a mechanic to put the car right. It began to rain right steadily.

So Frank and I walked to the red-domed top of the Greenwich footway which goes under the Thames, a narrow underground passage which takes you from the south side to the neighbourhood of Millwall and the Isle of Dogs. We had never been in it before. We descended by an iron stairway which was entirely deserted. There was

A NIGHT AT BILLINGSGATE

no policeman or sentry to guard it or watch it. We entered the long strange alley, which must have been constructed for the benefit of the dock labourers who live at Greenwich but work at London Docks or Millwall.

It is an eerie place at three in the morning. We stopped short, sure that we were being followed; and as we listened there outbroke on our ears the sharp noise of steps on the iron stairway. Was it a watchman? Or a policeman? We waited, standing stock-still, and as we did so we heard our own footsteps coming stealthily toward us and then again the clatter of steps of people coming down the iron stairway. Then we understood that they were echoes. The long, snake-like way was possessed by all manner of wandering sounds which could not escape into outer air and get lost. There were sounds there of people who had gone through it hours before.

We emerged on the north side of the Thames, in a forlorn region of padlocked warehouses and of riverside public-houses where lights were still burning in the bar-rooms though landlord and customers were alike bathed in stertorous peace.

Once we heard ribald laughter from a wretched bedroom where an oil lamp was burning. For half an hour we saw not a soul. At last a policeman, with the rain dripping from his helmet and cape, a slow-gazing, staring Bobby who thought we must be criminals and therefore cautiously followed us to the end of his beat. By the names

LONDON NIGHTS

of the streets we knew we must be near West India Dock—Cuba Street, Manilla Street, Havannah Street. We saw at times the strange dark river with its moving lights of barges, drifters, and patrols. We walked to Limehouse, and at four o'clock stood between Limehouse Causeway and Pennyfields, the heart of London's Chinatown.

"Let us walk up the worst street in London," I said to Frank. "Who knows what we may see!" The squat lamp-posts stood close to the walls of the houses of the crooked Chinese lane, and the lights burned dimly. Raindrops poured from window-sill and shutter; there were pools on the roadway. But all was peace. Nothing stirring on the *Sha-ho*. Not a Chinaman. In the dens under the roadway they may have been smoking with coloured women or playing fantan or euchre in fearsome corners, but up above in the wet there was no sign. Once we thought a window was being opened, but it was only the sound of water dropping from a choked gutter on to a rusty metal coping.

"I wonder how Claribel is faring, way back at Greenwich Observatory," I murmured, but we thought no more of mechanics or garages. It was after four. The East End began to stir. We heard the alarm clocks go off and saw lamp-light burst into many dark windows. Came the first workers out of their doors; came the first street-car of the morning to pick up morose and surly-

A NIGHT AT BILLINGSGATE

looking workers, passive to the rain as to the whole of their drab destiny.

By five in the morning we were in Billingsgate Market, watching the drifters on the Thames and waiting for the first porters to bring in the cargoes of marketable mackerel and cod. It was a great sight. On the stroke of five, with a pop, great arc lights burst forth, illuminating the covered market, and straightway all the work commenced; the dealers and the porters, and anon the buyers, appeared. Innumerable herrings were uncovered, and codlings and skate and haddock and blear-eyed rosy bream and sprawling, clawing crabs and lobsters. The porters with their gutter-brimmed hats are a race in themselves, a remarkable Phœnician-featured people who speak a language well known to us all. The portly dealers standing beside their open barrels and baskets and boxes, and admiring the contents, were themselves like fish, and might well have been named Mr. Plaice, Mr. Cod, Mr. Haddock, and the like.

What a noise, what a smell, what a scene! One corner in the vast caravanserai of East London! Outside, still it rained. We had our fifth breakfast. We thought again of Claribel seated in the car and the morning light stealing wanly over Greenwich and her. So we sat ourselves in a workman's tram on the other side of London Bridge and returned to the Observatory. Claribel greeted us wanly. We pushed the car to Green-

LONDON NIGHTS

wich Broadway and waited for a garage to open. Still it rained. Frank took Claribel home in a bus. I waited outside the three garages at Greenwich. Never mind. The magneto of the car was repaired at length. I drove it home. We all slept. In the evening we met again, with a couple of partridges, roast ones, and went over our adventures by the blaze of the fire. None of us was repentant.

*Fish, Fish, Art Thou in Thy Duty?**A Second Visit to Billingsgate*

THAT is what the fish said who stood up on his tail in the frying-pan in the Caliph's kitchen, in that wonderful Arabian nights story of the genie and the fisherman—"Fish, fish, art thou in thy duty?" And it came to my mind as I stood before dawn on Thames-side and watched tons of fish being unladed from trawlers—to feed London in Lent.

Twin green lights, like cat's eyes, gleam in the darkness of the river. They mark a ship full of eels. The ship is a Dane, and the Danes have had a privilege of remaining at the point since the days of Queen Elizabeth. At least, so a fish-porter, standing there with his magnificent leather hat, volunteers. It is always there with its green lights. Other Danish boats fare forth fishing and, coming to London, use the hulk as a floating rent-free warehouse of fish.

It is four o'clock of a March morning, icy cold—all the streets are white with rime. I stand, with two Australian friends, one a Rhodes scholar, the other an artist, outside Billingsgate Market, which is not yet open. There is a profound gloom, and a stale smell of fish. Policemen stand about like waxworks; cats are on the prowl.

Work has begun along an alley-way by the side of the market. Outside-porters are unlading a

LONDON NIGHTS

Norse boat of herrings, and we sidle past them down to the river shore. What a sight? On the quay a coal fire in a brazier is burning; on the water is a shadowy trawler with hanging lanterns; a gangway from the ship to the quay, and on it a procession of dark figures with bent backs and boxes on them, looking like slaves. They had big supports like saddles on their shoulders.

Various ships loomed out of the darkness. There was the *Batavia*, heaped up with bacon; there were two light "Bolshy" crafts standing over by Hayes' wharf laden with eggs; innumerable potential breakfasts. There was a big German boat with an escalator from its hold to the dock.

"It must have put a lot of men out of work when they installed that escalator," said the Australian student, who was incidentally the Labour correspondent of some Sydney paper. "You're right there," said the fish porter. "It was a sore blow when they started that machinery—but it's always going wrong, doesn't work very well."

We saw something jump from the Norse boat into the murky water and swim towards us. Not a live herring escaped! It swam and swam and then came up on the Thames mud; it was a rat. We stood and watched and stamped our cold feet, and all the while the long procession of porters and boxes filed upward, and an equal procession of porters without boxes filed back to the boat in a circle of toil.

"This is where men are cheaper than machines," said the Sydney man in wonderment.

FISH, FISH, ART THOU IN DUTY?

Night slowly gave way, and out of the darkness the great frame of the Tower Bridge emerged like a bridge in heaven. We had not been able to see it till then. And the arches of London Bridge became visible. We entered the market and stood in front of a large ex-mine-sweeper from the Firth of Forth, waiting with its great cargo of fish to discharge.

Down below us at the side was a gloomy barge with size-coloured garbage cans, waiting for condemned fish. When the market is over, it takes its smelly freight to the fish-mills of Barking.

Five minutes to five! In five minutes the market will open. The workers are hurrying from their beds and their little homes, swarming steadily in, but the building is dark. Suddenly, however, the big market bell begins to toll like some bell set on a dangerous rock in the sea—yell-yowl, yell-yowl-yowl-yowl, and with an exaggerated sound of striking matches, spitting and spluttering with blue and yellow flames, the great lamps of the market pop into brilliant incandescence. There is a rushing in of men and an outbreking of clamour.

A hundred stalls and booths are opened. The railway vans from North-Eastern goods stations besiege the market from the land side, with fish from Grimsby and Yarmouth, while on the water-side wait the ships.

The pubs and the coffee-houses open. The salesmen and the auctioneers take their morning

LONDON NIGHTS

"chasers" and come out into the frosty air buffeting themselves to keep warm. Men with hammers are prising open the flat crates of swarming giddy-looking herrings. At the slightest over-balancing of boxes out slipped a dozen or so fish looking as if alive, a sign of their freshness. Stale fish do not slip off so easily.

The genuine fish-porters were now on the scene, each marked with a disc and number like a taxi-driver, each wearing a remarkable weather-beaten hat which looked most picturesque, a hat with ridges and outer gutter and sometimes with spout, weighing five or six pounds and heavily padded at the crown. When the auctioneers arrived on the scene they began to unlade the large British trawler.

There were two auctioneers hard at work at six o'clock. They stood on rostrums, and as the porters brought up the boxes of fish, so they auctioned them off—quick work. One auctioneer looked like a big dog-fish—narrow-browed and big-jowled and small-eyed, he had taken a reflection from his trade. He was clothed in drab ordinary clothes with a fish-scale here and there—it was his livid face that spoke.

"Nine bob! Ten bob! Take it away! Fifteen bob! Sixteen bob!" he kept blurting.

The other auctioneer wore a straw hat, a white sweater, and white trousers. You might have thought he was going to play tennis. He had a fresh pink face, rimless glasses, and an expressive



A LONG PROCESSION OF PORTERS AND BOXES

FISH, FISH, ART THOU IN DUTY?

pouting mouth. He sang his auctioneering in a Jewish style.

"Eight bob I want; nine bob I want!"

Fast as they sold the fish more came on; now haddocks, now plaice, now halibut, now skate; each box open at the top but covered with little chunks and splinters of ice. The buyers clustered thickly about, bidding by hand and nod.

Din indescribable was now prevalent under the big lights of the market. You could not move for the chance of knocking a cod off some one's shoulder on to your back. The crowds swore at us roundly in "Billingsgit" when we got in the way. Even the fish on all the wooden platters and shelves looked angry with us and stared in speechless rage. The dog-fish looked as if it would bite us as we passed. The brown crabs swarming over one another in a welter seemed to wish to give us a nip.

Our Labour correspondent from Sydney was won from a critical spirit to admiration. "What system, what a hustle!" he exclaimed. Meanwhile it had become full morning. The sunlight was streaming upward through all the chimney-smokes of the East End. London Bridge looked gay; the Tower was stately. Women with the morning newspapers invaded the outskirts of the busy throng and sold their wares, to those who like us went out for an early breakfast. We had a memorable night out!

The Beggars

IS it a woman with a baby and a box of matches standing outside a tube station and making a mute appeal? Is it a trio of ex-Service men made up as women with red noses, old grey stockings half way up their thighs and rudimentary skirts, doing duty instead of monkeys to dance before an organ? Is it the Unemployed Band? Or the hangers-on to the theatre crowds? Or Saturday afternoon's lugubrious procession of street singers? We know that they are horrible, and that their number does not grow less.

While actual begging is illegal, pseudo-begging, begging with the thinnest veil, is met at every turn. Some countries, like France and the United States, are very free of beggars. There are no statistics, but I suppose this country, after Spain and Russia, has the biggest mendicant class. Germany has more war-cripples on the streets, but she has not so many able-bodied men and women beggars. Our beggars are mostly middle-aged. They are people with a past but no future.

The old-age pension keeps the aged from being led out by the children. The schools keep young children from being used to wring charity from pitiful grown-ups. Between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five boys and girls possess their first jobs, court one another, think of their looks, and preserve or even grow a self-esteem.

After twenty-five, after losing jobs, after de-

THE BEGGARS

grading sex-adventures, after luckless and reckless marriage, comes the danger time of going about in slovenly dress and not caring, of drinking, of pawning furniture and dress, of sponging where possible on parents, friends, neighbours. Useful and defensible as the pawnshop may be, it cannot be denied that the door, as you go out of it, leads right on to the street, on to the kerb.

The loss of self-respect is worse than losing money. There are thousands of starving people whose pride keeps them in their garrets starving, and will not allow them to join the motley throng of street-singers and match-sellers. On the other hand, there are plenty of beggars who make more by begging than they could by odd jobs. There are, for instance, a couple of prosperous-looking drabs who work the exits of the Soho restaurants after nightfall. They were there in 1921, they are still there and using the same formula:

"Ach, buy a box of matches, sir; buy a box of matches to help me out."

They spoil the business of the genuine match-vendors, who are a humble, modest tribe. They do not intend to sell matches, but to hold up those on pleasure bent. They get plenty of pence. They are not unfamiliar with the bar-room of the "Dog and Duck" and "The Crown and Two Chairmen." At the "Pillars of Hercules" they are not unknown.

The phrase "to help me out" refers to the price of a bed at a doss-house, generally estimated at

LONDON NIGHTS

eightpence. There is the nightly rendezvous of a host of degraded wretches who have had adventures with the public for twelve hours or more. Few who turn up there can be regenerated. You may capture them, feed them, clothe them, to their great horror bathe them, send them to the country—but to no avail. They nearly always come back to the old life and the old hank of laces, and the afternoon siesta on a doorstep and the evening's feverishness.

The beggars who have homes of their own are a better class, but their circumstances often more tragical. There are women doing charring and husbands on the streets. The men go out to "seek jobs," and plod in a hopeless sort of way to livery stables, to garages, to the sandwich-board emporium, to public-houses. They start conversations with you about the weather or about horses, and finish by telling you they've had no breakfast; often respectably enough dressed or wearing a raincoat over their shabbiness.

Men living on women's earnings are much commoner. A wound, shell-shock, rupture, rheumatism, are their excuses. "Let the old girl go out," is the idea.

There must also, it seems, be a new set living on the illicit profits of young street-walkers. Street-walking is much akin to begging. One would surely have to go a long way back in the history of social conditions in London to find a parallel to the present time. I refer to the women standing

THE BEGGARS

at the street corners and in the dark courts. So many of them are there that they are the subject of practical jokes by young children playing in the streets. And they have to save themselves from the pointed remarks and the teasings of the hobbledehoys.

It would be absurd to call them *filles de joie*; they look so matter-of-fact, ordinary and quasi-respectable. They are a type of beggars. They used to be "treated." Now they make a living of being "treated." The social system, for some reason or other, is grinding them out. They come from the suburbs to the centre.

It may be put down to the war or to the new poverty which has engulfed the lower middle class. Poverty, or rather the way people look upon it, is terribly degrading. A queue of poor women with satchels collects each Friday night outside a Soho poulterer's. It is a giblet queue. They buy for the merest pence or receive free the heads and insides of dressed chickens and ducks.

It is almost as bad as the heads and tails of fish which Moscow gives its prisoners, almost as bad as sorting out bits of food from the restaurant garbage-cans—and that, too, is done. It marks the grade of poverty and the point reached in personal misery and degradation.

But it cannot be too clearly understood that beggary is a moral rather than an economic breakdown. There are thousands of destitute Russians in London, victims of the Revolution, but you

LONDON NIGHTS

seldom find them on the streets. Their spirit has not been broken. And the extremity of misery has been avoided by each standing by each.

Our beggars are spiritless; the mainspring of their hearts has snapped. They are the victims of loose sexual morality, promiscuous and filthy living in slum dwellings, of drink, of a sloppy mentality.

Parts of our England, and especially parts of our London, are just beggar factories. I live near such an appalling beggar factory; a cross-street, all let out in single rooms above an asphalt court, where street-bettors congregate by day and alley-cats by night. The school-teacher, with her imperious finger pointing at dirty Lizzie Bates, effects little. The policeman, with his heavy boots and matter of fact, police-court routine mind; the clergyman's resignation to a bad neighbourhood and his "appeals" of all sorts; the M.P.'s grouching over it in Parliament; all together do little or nothing to stem the forces of demoralization.

Yet something could be done if every one, not one or two, cared a little more. The poor we have always with us, and we are content to have it so.

The Pavement Artists

I HAVE always been greatly touched by those who earn their living drawing pictures on the cold stone. As a child I could never pass them by. Grown-ups hurry on, but children can hardly be dragged past their pavement exhibitions. "Look, father; look, mother!" they cry; "a house on fire; look, there's the King!" But father and mother know that if they cast an indulgent glance on the pictures they must put a copper in the greasy cap at the far end of the show where in laboriously-looped handwriting in white chalk it says: "All my own work. Every little helps. I thank you."

The pleasure of my presence at all sorts of private views is requested at galleries in Bond Street, in Leicester Square, in Kensington, and I mingle at times with frock-coated gentry and lorgnetted ladies at the show of some celebrity. But, not to be exclusive, I have decided to give the outside artist a private view and a critique to-day.

An unshaven old fellow, with an overcoat which was new in 1850, kneels down on the pavement like a woman about to scrub a doorstep, and begins to crawl about and rub it clean with a large lump of ragged flannel. Having done so, he fumbles in the sagging lining of his coat for a sack of chalks. Then he marks off the limits of his pictures, puts down his hat, and begins to work. Then, as one inspired, he creates a bright world of his own,

LONDON NIGHTS

while small boys look on and stare, and the police consider him, and busy pedestrians hurry past.

"A famous R.A. invites your humble interest in his work," he scrawls.

"You are an R.A.?" you ask.

"Yes, sir; road hartist."

"I like your art."

"Yes, sir. It is hart. Some o' them as brings their hown work on bits o' wood and sets 'em up, couldn't drawr a lampo'."

"I suppose not."

The famous R.A., with wet thumb, was softening the while a sail on a ship, and gratefully acknowledged my interest.

"Saves a lot o' time, too, sir. He uses his pictures over and over again. Yes! But if a hinspector comes along my way and don' like my stuff, thinks it kind of hoverstudied, sir, and tells me to move hon, I leaves my picture-gallery behind. But *he* just picks up his bits o' wood, goes rahn the nex' cawner and sets 'em up again."

I soon realised the enmity which exists between the real pavement artist and the man who brings his pictures with him. My sympathies are with the former. He is the real wonder. He changes a drab and wretched square of pavement into something strange, lurid, fantastic, colourful.

There are in London and in most great cities recognised "pitches" or places where the pavement artist has tacitly established a right. They

THE PAVEMENT ARTISTS

have their "ancient lights" of the causeway, and the police have to accept them. It does not matter to the police whether the artist is *bona fide* or not; the main thing to them is the question of the obstruction of traffic. When hauled before the magistrate the street-artist always has to meet the charge of loitering with intent to cause obstruction.

But their arrest is unpopular. Their chief sorrow lies in the competition and jealousy of the brotherhood. In this they are like other artists, I suppose. The one who is behindhand finds that another has "pinched his pitch," and he has to wander on to some obscure gallery beside some miserable railing where kids are playing hopscotch or peg-top.

In Russell Square, opposite the entrance to the Turkish baths, is a recognised pitch, but it is not a good one. The exhibition changes daily. At night it is too dark and a lantern has to be hung to show the pictures. How different from that coveted site opposite Gatti's, where the jovial diner and his lady step forth in the common night illumination from restaurant door to picture-gallery. One evening, to my surprise, I found the Russell Square corner occupied by a woman artist.

"Ole Bill was 'ere yesterday," said she. "I 'ad to wash aout all 'is work 'fore I could begin. But it ain't no good. On'y sixpence up to nah. Yers, I allus washes out the old 'fore I begin a new. If it 'asn't been rainin' I go into the laiedies' lava-

LONDON NIGHTS

tory, yes, sir, and get some water an' washes it all out. Yes, I do. But I won't come 'ere no more. Ah used ter be on Cockspur Street."

She screamed this at me.

"But a feller with a wooden leg come an' sneaked my pitch, 'e did. And lots of orficers come by and often throw down a tanner. They paid my rent every Monday. Nah I'm so behind with it. They'll turn me out, an' I don' wan' to come on the parish; would you?"

I sympathised.

She specialised in drawing pariahs, sections of jellyfish, octopuses, falls of soot, very modern in treatment. I don't intend to give away her method. But once in Brompton an old lady commissioned her to do three pictures for her drawing-room at half-a-crown apiece.

"I done my bit in the war, too," she asserted. "I got two ribs fractured, but they don't give me no pension. I served in a canteen for three years and got shelled out of it. No good for no more work, charin' and the like."

There are, however, few ladies in the pavement-artist profession.

I thought Mr. Murgatroyd's exhibit at St. Mary-le-Strand quite good. Of course, had such art been submitted to the Royal Academy and accepted, it would have been hopelessly "skied," whereas here it is laid at your feet. The policy of Academicians in allotting all the best space to their own pictures is rather selfish, and does not

THE PAVEMENT ARTISTS

give enough encouragement to the struggling artist.

Mr. Murgatroyd, however, would have been disqualified because his eight pavement pictures were done inside the letters of the word PATIENCE. For him it is technique that matters. He has the artist's creed. So it is no use asking him why within the letter P he has drawn Loch Lomond, or within the C he has drawn a tiger. There is an eternal fitness about these things. P in Murgatroyd's mind really stands for Pub, but as an artist he is unaware of the existence of such a vulgar place.

The tiger, in the last letter but one, stands, however, for hunger, and is a very favourite symbol in the work of the old pavement school. It is voracity incarnate.

Within the letter T the artist has managed to depict the Pyramids, with an Arab there at home. T for King Tut perhaps, but Mr. Murgatroyd said No, he intended to put there an Indian scene.

Near the National Portrait Gallery there is often a street-gallery, not so negligible as art-lovers might imagine, showing a popular view of the national heroes as figured in the minds of those who have sometimes to finish up the day at Rowton House. Pavement portraits, even if not studied from life, have a certain quality, a genuine character, which distinguishes them.

Mr. Lloyd George, with a crooked, lined brow and well-brushed locks, has a look of the immortal

LONDON NIGHTS

Mr. Jaggers, as if he also were always washing his hands with scented soap. The red cheeks of Lord Derby, a very popular figure, have in them somehow a regimental glow from the army he raised. The late Lord Kitchener looks as if he were threatening Britannia with a broomstick.

Mr. Baldwin begins to emerge from the drab pavement like a cinema picture, with a face "wreathed in smiles." The King has a look of "The King: God bless him!" The Prince of Wales looks as if he had just arrived somewhere in a great hurry and will be off before you can name him. The Duke and Duchess of York are done together like a photograph of a self-conscious honeymoon couple—royal, and yet one with Hoxton at the same time.

I once saw a self-satisfied artist sitting at the end of such a string of pictured celebrities drinking tea—or was it soup?—from a salmon tin, watching the world go by as his nose dipped into the can. The preoccupied way with which he acknowledged a copper was worthy of one who, in the long run, cared more for art than for money. How they must despise sometimes the vulgar patrons who stoop and criticise what they do not understand!

I often wonder where the artists study. Where do they find their models? Do they gloat over the illustrated papers? Personally I think their work has little reflection of the newspaper illustrations. And it is not like those paintings which



A FAMOUS R.A. (ROAD-ARTIST) DRAWS A TIGER

THE PAVEMENT ARTISTS

sell for three hundred pounds apiece at the Art Club's show. It is nearer to the spirit of the print-shop window. It is nearer to the Cruikshank illustrations of Dickens. Many really remarkable studies which would have been valuable on canvas have been washed out by the rain or trodden under foot—the work of pavement artists.

A house on fire is not a favourite subject with fine painters. But if you want to see it done, watch Ike doing it on a Sunday evening on the Whitechapel Road. He can draw a fireman's ladder five times as quickly as a fireman can climb up the ladder. He can make the fireman rescue sweet maids in their nightdresses—nightdresses of chalk.

He can realise the scene of fear, the racket, the violence of the scene symbolised in the flaming ochre of the firemen's helmets and in the gleam of their resolute axes. Indeed, it may be said white chalk on pavement is the best possible medium for rendering the jets of water from the fire-hose playing on the flaming building.

Fire produces the greatest tragedy of the street, and the man who is nearest to it expresses it most vividly and intimately—the man on the pavement.

Curfew in Berwick Street

THE lamps of the narrow street are not on posts, but on metal arms which come out from the brick walls. In between there are two long lines of stalls and a tightly-packed, slow-moving crowd. It is Soho's cheap row—the mart of ribbon and buttons and of Covent Garden's second best. In the heart of the gay West, but a minute or so from Piccadilly Circus, one could hardly imagine it possible to see so many working-class people with satchels, shopping. The chauffeurs of the theatre cars, however, know it, for the waiting queues of spangling limousines are sometimes axle-deep in decaying cabbage leaves.

There is a great moment in the life of the market, and that is at ten o'clock, when it packs up and goes home, with wallets full of coppers and silver and the consciousness of a day's peddling well ended. There comes a moment when the crowds melt away—a shower of rain is most effective—and then with one accord the hawkers begin to demobilise. Lights go out. The vendor from the back of a stall goes to the front. Out come baskets and boxes for the stowing away of goods. The lace and the ribbons are wound round sheets of cardboard; the silk scraps are tied up in old dingy sheets; the music-sheets are collected and put into battered suit-cases; the unsaleable greens are shot into the roadway; the cats' meat

CURFEW IN BERWICK STREET

is done up in neat little packets; fruit-stalls change into moving hawkers' barrows and wheel away.

More lights go out. Down comes an unkind deluge of rain. All the stalls have changed to skeletons of stalls, but water drenches overboard from their roofs. There is a hammering and a knocking as if many scene-shifters were at work, and loud echoing shouts of men giving orders as to what to do next. Off go stall roofs! Off comes the stall shelf. Roofs and shelves are tipped into the churchyard of St. Luke. Children come prowling among the rubbish and greens and packing and shavings and wisps of paper on the roadway, seeking lost coppers or dropped goods. Cats look out of doorways into the rain and fain would follow the children's example.

Even the skeletons of the stalls then begin to fade into thin air. Darkness comes on apace. The goods, on moving barrows and in perambulators, are being wheeled to the slum houses where the owners live. There is a marvellous clearance. The street becomes visible and for the first time during the night one notices tiny Maidenhead Passage and the white-roofed, narrow, Byzantine-looking way called Tylers Court, well known to street bookies and their clients. Thronged Walters Court, where one has not been able to hear oneself speak all day, becomes a blank, empty alley. St. Anne's Church chimes ten. A tall

LONDON NIGHTS

policeman surveys the empty scene and sees that it is good. The rain ceases. The dogs and the cats come forth for spoils. A boy on a scooter tries his wheels in the litter and falls among the cabbage leaves. Old women with voluminous skirts come from poor streets and sort the litter for bits of wood and combustible cardboard, anything for their fires.

Meanwhile the petty business men and women are thronging the bar of "The Intrepid Fox: the Friend of the People" and "The Two Chairmen," and many another historic public-house of the neighbourhood. You do not grow rich selling to the poor, for you spend your profit in the poor's way—at the bars, or with the bookies. I get into conversation with the tall policeman. He does not like the hawkers and their barrows. "They make everything look so cheap," said he. He told me there was a tendency for the market to extend itself. Stalls were appearing in Old Compton Street and bringing down the value of the property. "The trouble is," said he, "one side of the street is in the Vine Street area and the other in Great Marlborough Street. When I tell one of them to move on, he just crosses the road and he knows I can't touch him."

One of the chief complaints against the market, however, is in the garbage it leaves behind. This, in great part, has to remain rotting on the roadway for hours. The children of the parish of St. Anne's, sleeping in the little courts and passages,

CURFEW IN BERWICK STREET

breathe in the odours of decay, and when a stranger makes a short cut from Windmill Street through Soho at eleven he passes over a wild and desolate scene, like the bed of the rotten sea.

At a Confidence Auction

WAITING to go into a theatre, having in fact come too early, I was wandering idly in the Strand, when I was attracted by a pavement crowd. Some one was shouting; there was no policeman in sight, and the footway was entirely blocked by curious people.

I joined the "rubberers," as they call them in America, and, craning my head above them, saw a bareheaded, scrubby-faced young man with a pile of little white boxes in his hands.

"Who'll bid a penny on a box?" he was shouting. "I'm not going to open them. There may be gold inside. It's a treat, but you must trust me. We've only got a dozen of them. Come on. Six, seven, a gentleman over there, eight. There are four more boxes. I only ask you to bid a penny. Collect the pennies, Bill, just to show that they are all *bona-fide* bidders. Come on now, four more sporting gents."

His helper, Bill, also without hat, collected the pence. I noticed that the boxes were not distributed to those who bid. The pavement auctioneer seemed to have come out of the shop at the back and now, as he yelled, he slowly retreated with boxes and pence into an empty shop front. He secured four more bidders for the little white boxes. With magnetic power he drew the dozen men and women with penny stakes into the doorway of the shop. He produced an extra half-

AT A CONFIDENCE AUCTION

dozen boxes and seemed to secure bidders for them. I handed over a copper. We all got right inside and then the door was shut.

After all, it appeared that only nine people had actually bid pennies for boxes. The other nine were obliging members of the auction staff, some of whom bid twice.

"Will you who bid pennies come right forward?"

We sheepishly advanced and found ourselves facing a new man standing above us on a luridly-lighted platform. The new man, who was evidently the boss, was a Whitechapel type, broad-faced, dirty, thick-lipped, with deep-cut, crooked furrows in his brow, and having thick, uncombed hair.

His strident voice made us all feel criminals.

"Before I give out these boxes," said he, "I am going to give a prize. I am going to do something which is very seldom done. I am going to force one of you to take, in addition to his white box, this case of hair-brushes. This very fine case of hair-brushes is a reward. It is not for sale. But I am going to bid a penny on it myself."

His punishing voice ceased for a moment, and he whipped out a penny.

Several people smiled, but the auctioneer looked as if he were preparing to fight with a bunch of rough men. His eyes stared suggestively about the crowd.

"Come!" he gonged suddenly with his big voice.

"Who bids more? Don't be afraid. Sixpence, thank you. This will cost you nothing. I only want to be sure that you are all *bona-fide* bidders. One shilling. One and six. It's a prize. You, what do you bid? Two shillings. What do you bid? Two and six."

I determined not to bid, as in any case I did not want to carry home a superfluous pair of hair-brushes. I went on placidly smoking a cigar. I felt I was receiving attention, but reflected that even if I proved to be a fool I had only ten shillings or so in my pocket.

The bidding on the hair-brushes had got to four and six. "You," said the auctioneer to me, "what do *you* bid?"

"Nothing," said I bravely.

"But you bid a penny on the white box. What do you bid on the hair-brushes?"

He pointed at me, and his eyes were like a couple of dazzling headlights.

"Nothing," said I.

"Nothing; very well," said the auctioneer. "It stands at four and six; any one bid any more? Five shillings. Right. Hand up the money, just to show you are a *bona-fide* bidder. I told you this was to go as a prize, and I'm a man of my word. Here, I hold the five shillings in one hand and the hair-brushes in the other. I give you the hair-brushes and also the five shillings back."

A scrubby-looking old man received the prize

AT A CONFIDENCE AUCTION

and pocketed it. There was a lot of shuffling. The various bidders seemed a little puzzled.

The big-faced auctioneer tramped to and fro on his rostrum in the dazzling electric light.

"Now," said he, "will all those who bid a penny on these white boxes come forward. I want you each to bid a penny on a fountain-pen. Do not be alarmed; you will not lose your pennies."

We came forward.

"You," said he to me, pointedly, "will you bid a penny on this fountain pen?"

"Why, yes," said I, "if you like."

"Very well, hand up the penny."

I did so and at once received a blue box entitled "The Lever Self-filled All-British Pen, fully guaranteed. An Exhibition Memento," and I also received my penny back.

Much amused, I put the pen in my pocket, thinking it would probably be one of those pens which removing-van assistants used to find in the street and ask you if you knew the value of them. You paid a shilling or so, and when you got home you found it was a pen that would not hold ink and would not write. But I was mistaken; this was a genuine pen of a kind, and in any case I had paid nothing for it.

The auctioneer, despite his grim style, had put us all on good terms with ourselves. But he then re-started in an aggrieved tone.

"I have another great treat for you," said he.

"One of you shall have it, and I'll make him say 'Thank you' before he takes it. A solid gold, twin-lever, Swiss-built chronometer. It is worth twenty pounds. The gold alone is worth more than you will bid for it. There is no reserve. It goes to the highest bidder, and as I said—this is a treat, not a sale; you shall take it from me and you shall say 'Thank you.'"

I went on smoking my cigar, but I felt painfully aware that I had accepted a fountain pen for nothing and had not said "Thank you" for it. I almost wished they would distribute those white boxes on which we had originally bid, and let us go out. I looked to the door and saw it was kept by a lively-looking doorkeeper. A woman near me whispered dramatically that she felt so nervous. However, the bidding went on. The auctioneer himself bid a shilling on the watch. It went up to two pounds. I was appealed to, but refused to bid.

The man who bid two pounds seemed to be genuine. He handed up the money, absolutely new notes.

"I will hold your money and I will hold the watch for the present," said the auctioneer. "You will get them later. But I will now throw in a silver cigarette-case."

The same man bid ten shillings for the cigarette-case, handed up the money, and it was kept.

Then a luxurious-looking toilet case was exposed. Its contents were handed round the room

AT A CONFIDENCE AUCTION

and were obviously worth a great deal. There was a fine bevelled-edged solid silver-backed mirror which was certainly an attractive piece.

"Before I put this to you," said the auctioneer, "will those who bid on the little white boxes step forward. I want you each to bid a penny on another article. I shall not say what it is. Come on now, number one, number two, number three. . . ."

All nine of us seemed to be present.

I did not bid, but the auctioneer turned on me wrathfully and then ingratiatingly. "Just to oblige!" said he. Since "manners makyth man," I forked out another penny, congratulating myself that I seemed to have a fair number of coppers in my pocket.

"That's right," said the auctioneer, with an air of triumph. And he distributed a series of small packets. I took mine to the back, and opened it. I found I was in possession of a Gillette safety-razor.

The toilet-case was then put up to auction. The man who "won" the watch and the cigarette-case went to four pounds fifteen, but was outbid by some one who went to five pounds, and he would go no further. This seemed greatly to distress the auctioneer, but he said he had another case. Five pounds seemed to be paid for the first case which we all had inspected. An "identical" case was offered for the same money.

The bidder refused it. The auctioneer there-

LONDON NIGHTS

upon offered to treat him, and put the reserved watch and cigarette-case and the two pounds ten he had bid for them inside the toilet-case and offered the lot if five pounds were handed over. The bidder still refused. There was a claque chorus of "Take it, take it," the auctioneer brow-beat him, but all to no avail. The toilet-case stunt failed.

But the bidder took the watch and cigarette-case in exchange for his two pounds ten.

Then we each received a free gift of a pocket-mirror and moustache-comb. We then bid ten shillings each on certain plush-covered cases. I thought I had had a shilling's worth of amusement, so when specially appealed to to play the game I handed over a shilling. But I did not get the case. We were then invited to stake a pound each on nine boxes of teaspoons, sugar-tongs, and butter-knives. But as it was just on theatre-time I decided to go out.

"But you have bid a shilling on one of these cases," said the doorkeeper.

"Doesn't matter, I'm in a hurry," said I, but I could not get out.

"Go up and get the case first," said the doorkeeper.

I went up, but I was invited with the rest to put a pound on the teaspoons first. "Haven't got it," said I. "Well, I'll put a pound of my own in the case for you," said the auctioneer. "But I don't want to take it away," said I. "It's no use

AT A CONFIDENCE AUCTION

to me." "I'll take it from you," said a woman. Then I agreed. The auctioneer was pleased. His clerk proceeded to take the money from each of the nine bidders. "Take mine from inside the case," said I. "I haven't got a pound on me."

Scandal!

The doorkeeper was obliged to let me out. I got to my theatre just before the curtain went up, and examined with much mirth then and in the entr'actes my fountain-pen, safety-razor, pocket-mirror and moustache-comb. The play was not uninteresting, but I could not help the reflection that the life itself in the streets of our great city can often provide accidental dramas and scenes more curious and diverting than anything on the stage. Life is a good curtain-raiser to the stage.

I ought to add that I write these lines with the pen; I had an excellent shave with the safety-razor this morning; and I comb my moustache complacently when I think I only left one and twopence behind. It was a mystery play. I am still wondering what was in those white boxes which were never dealt out. The play I saw afterwards fades from my mind. Those little white boxes remain.

An Evening at Wandsworth Gaol

I HAVE only once been in prison, and that for a night in Russia, when I found myself in a black den with a blind man bereft of his wits, an aged dame, and two horse thieves. I remember some liberal philanthropist braved the sentries and offered me a shilling towards the expenses of my defence. He believed I was a politician, but I was only a bezpassportny—a tramp without a passport. In the night children came to the prison grating and gave water to the thirsty. It was not altogether an amusing night, but I have often wished since then to serve a term and see a prison from within.

Seeing prison life from outside is an entirely different matter. The outsider who visits the prison, no matter how sympathetic, is only in it, but not of it. With that proviso I hasten to add that my visit to Wandsworth Gaol was purely as an outsider. A voice on the telephone one morning asked: "Would you care to come down to Wandsworth and talk to six hundred prisoners about your travels or about ideals?" I agreed with alacrity. It was an opportunity to learn something of the life of men in prison, and I took it.

I decided to talk to the men about my travels, for I was sure they would prove stony ground for a sermon on ideals.

Spring was green on Wandsworth Common,

EVENING AT WANDSWORTH GAOL

and small birds were singing in the bushes of the little lane by which I approached the gaol. I entered by a little heavy door in the blind wall. I looked on the face of a man who kept the door and I entered prison air.

"You will find them like a crowd of Tommies," said the chaplain, a quiet and sad priest, the sombreness of his clerical attire seeming to have invaded his face and his eyes.

We sat together and had tea by a sort of study fire, while outside, men with heavy keys walked along stone ways. Somewhere in this petty Bastille the prisoners were assembling.

"If you have ever spoken to Tommies," said the chaplain, "it's much the same thing. You can say to them anything you like. It doesn't matter if you make them split their sides with laughing."

So I came into a large hall, evidently used for Church service. I was introduced with the usual formula: "The speaker needs no introduction from me. I am sure many of you have . . ." Six hundred diminutive, untidy-looking men in khaki, with blue numbers on their chests, sat huddled and peered curiously at me. The chaplain was perhaps mistaken; they were not like Tommies, because they were obviously undisciplined; they had no *esprit de corps*, they lounged in their seats. Despite khaki, every man was self-developed and individualistic. One thing they all had, however, and that was the blight of crime and punishment on their souls.

LONDON NIGHTS

So I told them of Mexico and the real Wild West, and tried to fire their imagination by pictures of a man's life out there; the glory of horses, the interest of Indian tribes and Mexicans, the shooting, the real adventures and dangers, the chances of making a fortune, of finding gold, of counting for something in the world. I told them of weird Indian dances, of wild gatherings of cowboys, of throwing the plunging steer, of the chuck-wagon, and the life of the ranch camp.

One thing at once was abundantly clear; the prisoners had a tremendous sense of humour. Directly they discovered that I had something novel to tell them, they were on the alert for jokes. They did not wish to hear of danger or of sad events—I felt that at once and cut out everything of that kind—but they were gluttons for fun.

Though there is nothing particularly humorous about it, they must have laughed three minutes on end at a description I gave of a chorus of Indians singing at a sacred dance. Perhaps it was the "hoi-hoi-ho-ho, ha-ha-ha-ha," that set them off. I heard several of them repeating it during the rest of my remarks. I tried to tell them about the good looks of young squaws. But the very idea of a squaw seemed to fill them with mirth.

So it might be said we got on famously together. "There's some extremely clever fellows in that crowd," said a prison visitor. "First-class men in their profession, absolutely at the top of the tree." He was referring to burglars. I had a wild

EVENING AT WANDSWORTH GAOL

impulse to say to the prisoners, "Now, which of you all is Horatio Bottomley?" But I was told he was at the Scrubbs.

"That sort of man spends most of his time in hospital. I don't know how it's done. They manage it somehow."

"Different from the days of Oscar Wilde, when he was sent to prison!"

I wondered nevertheless what a sensitive man would feel, thrust in among the crowd.

"Their talk, when left to themselves, is sheer obscenity," said one official. "Never talk anything but filth."

An expert cracksman wanted a message of some kind taken to his wife. "I'll do it," said a visitor, "if you'll promise never to break into my house."

"I'll do more than that," said the burglar. "If your house is ever attacked, or if you lose your gold watch and chain in a crowd, put an advertisement at once in the paper and if I'm out of gaol I'll make sure it is returned to you in twenty-four hours."

The six hundred gave me a tremendous ovation. All their faces gleamed with merriment. Some seemed sizing me up satisfactorily. I raised my hand. "I've been telling you all this about Mexico," said I in conclusion, "because I think one or two of you might like to go there some time."

At this every one roared. It was the best joke of the afternoon.

LONDON NIGHTS

"You could easily work your passage out or stow away. And, once there, why there's a real life of adventure, and a chance of making your fortune."

The prisoners nudged one another and chortled. That was funny. That was the best ever. "Catch us going there!" seemed written on every brow. "We know something better than that, don't we, mates?"

So I made a discovery. Our criminals would rather enjoy the police they have than fly to others that they know not of. They are getting on quite nicely and comfortably.

"In and out, all their lives," said the prison visitor, a tall man in a silk hat and a frock coat, and possessed of a Kensingtonian accent.

"Newcomers," said he, "feel quite cast down and ashamed first day in, but in a week or so they get to be as chirpy as the rest. They ought to put it across the first offender more. They are the only prisoners who feel anything."

With this I naturally disagreed. The prisons are rest-houses for people who lead a life of crime. They are schools for the inexperienced. No first offender should ever be sent to a prison where he comes into the company of the cynical and the hardened.

Black Dawn at Prison Gates

“YES, what is difficult about their life is the other side,” said the prison chaplain. “We have a busy time, I assure you, the assistant and myself, the ten visitors. Every man shut in prison is cut off from his family, his friends, his employer. Many suffer mentally far more than they do physically, worrying about wives who have no money, daughters perhaps on the verge of going on the streets, jobs perhaps kept open by a benevolent employer, or perhaps lost for ever, mates left in a fix by sudden disappearance into gaol. It is terrible what a lot is on the minds of some of the men. They need letters written, messages given, some one to go and see a boss or a wife, or a landlord or a child.”

“Gell, gell, gell, gell!”

We were interrupted by the clangour of a bell.

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” said the chaplain, “I fear I shall have to leave you for a while. These are the relatives of a condemned man come to see me.”

“What, of some one who is going to be executed?”

“Yes, poor fellow, he will be hanged to-morrow morning at dawn.”

“A murderer, of course?”

“Yes, but a hard case.”

“He will be hanged here?”

“Yes.”

I was given to the charge of a police-inspector

LONDON NIGHTS

and taken to a private room in the vast barred and wire-netting-hung interior of one of our great London prisons. And there I sat with a full-open door and watched the padre and the warders pass.

Every official in the prison has a key-turning hand. Door upon door is locked. There is a continual, habitual action of turning a master-key. Those who live outside of prisons look at keyholes when they insert keys, but the grey-faced men never look; locking and unlocking doors and gates has become automatic.

I sat in a leathern chair and listened to the prison silence, broken only by the sounds of heavy steps and of the turning of keys, and I mused on the terrible thought: Some one in this dreary Bastille has "got to swing" to-morrow morning, and every one knows it here; all the warders, all the officials, all the prisoners.

"Yes, that is an unfortunate aspect of it," said the chaplain when he rejoined me. "Every one gets to know. You cannot keep it secret. Many brood on it. Some, however, no doubt, remember the condemned man in their prayers. But the thought of an execution in the prison certainly adds to the feeling of misery."

"The men are all busy in the shops now. Would you like to see them? They are kept very busy for a seven-hour day. It's good for them. Takes their minds off themselves."

We visited the boot-makers, all in khaki, with red stars on their shoulders, all very businesslike,

BLACK DAWN AT PRISON GATES

cutting soles, cutting out uppers, sewing, nailing. They could not have looked more deeply engaged in their work had it been in their own shops. They were, of course, under the vigilant eye of a warder who would report them if they slackened. But I understood they were allowed to speak to one another when they felt like it—an indulgence which used strictly to be forbidden. It cannot, however, be said that there was a hum of talk.

We visited the makers of ships' fenders and of sacking, of mailbags, of mail-baskets. There were baskets being made for the G.P.O. large enough to hold three men. Dozens of rogues in khaki stood in the midst of wicker and straw and baskets in all stages of building. We visited the wood-chopping yard and saw a much rougher-looking crowd chopping wood and stringing it in firewood bundles.

In another cage the old, the weak, and the feeble were picking fibre and stuffing mattresses. This was truly a dreadful section. For the hands of the old men barely moved, and their grey faces stared expressionlessly at the fibre in their hands.

"There are some," said the chaplain, "who have never done any work in their lives; old and incorrigible beggars. They always find their way in here to pick the fibre."

"How do they decide what the prisoners will be set to do?"

"Oh, by their looks."

"It's surprising. This place is like a great

factory. Do they pay the men anything for what they do?"

"Oh, no, that goes towards their keep. It is said the great prisons all pay for their upkeep."

I was surprised. I thought some little sum was kept for the prisoner and given him upon release so as to help him to a fresh start—something of what he had earned by his toil. But that is not so. The prisoners, when their time is done, are released without a copper more than they brought into gaol with them.

We passed to the tin-mug factory, and then to the printers and binders. Here the tattered volumes from the prison library were being repaired, copies of "Hymns Ancient and Modern" were being rebound. The prisoners seemed very happy. Here we found two Chinese from Shanghai.

"Smoke pipe?" queried the chaplain.

"Naoh."

"No smoke pipe back in China? Or do this perhaps?"

The old padre made a gesture of pricking his arm with an injection needle. The Chinese did not admit by one line in their faces that they understood anything about it. Smart fellows! They went on with their work of sewing up hymn-books.

We went to the prison bakehouse. We crossed several yards. I stared at heaps of upturned gravel, vaguely haunted by the thought of the

BLACK DAWN AT PRISON GATES

dead man on the morrow. We passed a tiny garden of wilting candytuft and marigolds. We walked where they exercise the prisoners, along the flags between pale plots of grass. Hard stones and bitter views.

We returned to the main corridor of the prison.

Something then I noticed was toward. A policeman hurried up and gave a signal; it was passed on. Some one said: "All clear!"

I turned to the chaplain.

"They are giving the 'All clear' signal," said he, "for the condemned man to return to his cell. Nobody must see him. He has been for his last conversation with his relatives."

We went into a room and sat down and were silent.

"It's no use," said the padre reflectively. "The poor demented mother is rushing off to the Home Office now in a last vain hope to do something."

I went out. Gates turned laboriously on their iron hinges. I saw a wet-eyed girl and a boy with strained large eyes standing beside the outer door, an unforgettable look on their faces. Poor unhappy ones!

But outside—all the world went on as before—trams, buses, people. Outside is outside. It's very different.

Next morning early I walked past the prison. There were a dozen stout warders at the door. A silk-hatted gentleman came up in a car. There were many police. I did not see the chaplain, nor

LONDON NIGHTS

the gallows, and I saw no quicklime on the warders' boots.

But the tram-cars stop outside the prison "if required," and while I waited I saw once more that girl and that boy. They descended from the tram with two wreaths and a cross of flowers in their hands and slowly walked up a side street there. The police on duty stared at them, and one whispered something to his neighbour, whereat he nodded.

He nodded, nodded, nodded, as if reflecting to himself, who and why, and there was a very pitiful, compassionate expression on his features.

The execution did not attract the attention of the public. But some stood there and waited. There only came forth, however, from the prison the discharged men of the day, those who had done their term, unconcernedly, cautiously, on to the great highroad. Loungers lean against the public-house wall opposite. Little children in strings are on their way to school. A group of unemployed are discussing horses. But the newly-bathed ex-prisoners, back in civil attire, trying to walk like ordinary men, are not interested. They, most of them, want to get to some room or hovel or corner which they call home. They do not even think of the man who is dead.

They are watched, but they disappear into the world, into the midst of us. Discharge ought to be the most important moment of a prison term,

BLACK DAWN AT PRISON GATES

but it is not, because the prisoner comes out of prison no happier than he entered.

The life of London is saddest of all—at the prison gates.

Prison Nights

PRISON is closely allied to the Embankment after midnight, and to the doss-houses. Half the population of a London prison at any given time is derelict. It is socially spoiled human material. Coming out of prison, they have no "characters" and can find no means of wage-earning; or if that is overlooked and they obtain occupation they cannot behave honestly and decently in it. It is a sorry business, trying to rehabilitate a gaol-bird.

I spent a good deal of time prison visiting, last year, but finding myself less free this year I have given up the work. While doing it, I was not permitted to write about it, but now I am at liberty to do so. The memory remains a pleasant one, with a reverse side of utter despair. The prisoners were so glad to see one, but then one could do so fantastically little for them.

The procedure was this: I would arrive at Pentonville at six in the evening, and, entering my name and time of arrival at the door-keeper's lodge, would be presented with a pass-key of the cells. One left coat and hat in the chaplain's room and then proceeded to the main gates, where any warder or superintendent would open to you upon recognition.

There would generally be a certain facetiousness. "We don't often have them clamouring to get in."

PRISON NIGHTS

The warders were always all smiles in the presence of the visitor. They dislike their gloomy uniforms and the prisoners' soiled khaki. So a stranger in mufti is an agreeable diversion. The visitor brings something of the outside world to this very much "inside" place.

The prison is largely stone and iron. The interior railings remind one of houses in the Zoo. The clangorous iron spiral staircases climbing from gallery to gallery are something like tube stairs, though not underground. The lighted kiosk at the central door bespeaks watchfulness. The warders waiting on the landings breathe watchfulness. The prison is a watchful place.

My first rounds were with the old chaplain, an indulgent, humour-loving priest, who was on very good terms with all of them. He had seen too much crime to have any horror of it left in his constitution. "They are only the fools in here," he would say. "The clever ones get away."

He would turn the key in a mechanical way in the lock of a cell and fling the door wide, exposing the grey, narrow room and the caught man sitting in a corner of it.

"Well, when do *you* go out?" the chaplain would call to him, without further introduction, and when he had the answer he would approach and ask in a dramatic whisper: "When're you coming back to us?"

"They always come back," he averred.

"Well," to the prisoner. "Don't be long! We shall miss you, you know."

"I wanted to arst ye somethin'," a prisoner would say.

"Well, what is it?"

"I wondered as if anybody could 'elp me to a job when-a-goes-out."

"All right; you go out next Wednesday, put in to see the Prisoners' Aid on Monday."

There, alone, lay the road of material help. It sounded as if it meant something. But the Prisoners' Aid Society does not command the funds to make substantial grants to prisoners starting life afresh, nor is it able to influence employers to take the risk of re-employing felons.

The prisoner goes before the Committee, tells his tale, with more or less woeful circumstance. Some one asks him a question. Then the chairman of the Committee gives a nod. Prisoner is led out in silence. When he is discharged he finds that half-a-crown was awarded him. One nod means half-a-crown; two means five shillings.

Prisoners are anxious not only about the chance of jobs, chance of half-crowns, but about homes, rents, wives, children. One can help them by writing letters, or by visiting homes. The home, if there is one, gives the environment. I was in all sorts of curious dens of, one can hardly call it the "under-world," the expression is too romantic—of the very poor. Here, amid children, cats, old clothes and dirt and swarms of "neighbours" was

PRISON NIGHTS

the nest of the man in gaol. I saw the wives "bearing up" or not "bearing up," cursing their husbands, or waiting patiently for husbands, seldom solid women, wisps of slum femininity to which one all-too-readily applied the adjective "worthless," "no account," "feckless." Their wretched furniture and effects were in and out of pawnshops all the time. Some seemed to use the pawnshops in an absurd way, only buying things to pawn them, and then eternally hoping to be able to get them out again.

The women seldom seemed in partnership in crime. The "honest" burglar's wife took in washing; the wife of the false-pretences man went out charring. This one worked in a factory; this other was a seamstress. Sometimes one found a wife on the streets. Sometimes one found a wife who had gone into service as a "Miss" and was living in somewhere, her mistress never suspecting that she had a husband either in or out of gaol. Incidentally, it was strange to realise how many alleged wives were not really wives at all in a legal sense. Many in the lowest layers of society are, to use the phrase of inspectors, "co-habiting." She is not a girl that he once courted in the twilight, but "a woman I once met in a public-house."

The prisoner's account of his home differs greatly from reality. It is like his account of his crime; his ill-luck, his one mistake. I found, however, that the lies suggested by vanity were checked by the truth dictated by necessity. If you promised

LONDON NIGHTS

to write a letter for a prisoner his directions might be very highfalutin, but if he knew you were visiting his haunts he became more matter-of-fact. In prison, as if in some great international hotel, he feels himself citizen of the world, but he knows that his thumb-marks relate him to King's Cross. He is the all-too-familiar bad shilling which keeps coming back.

I asked a man of twelve convictions why he did not make up his mind to keep out of gaol for a while. But he was convinced there was no means of earning an honest living. "I'm a bent or battered coin," said he, with a grin, "I always come back."

I was greatly taken by a young fellow into whose cell I peeped by chance one evening. He was fresh, clean and handsome, not over twenty. He had a photograph of a beautiful girl on his table, and he was doing eighteen months' imprisonment. He was a burglar, and had been convicted of a whole series of daring crimes. The girl was his fiancée; he had met her at a dance and was able to "treat" her well, but she had no idea where he obtained his money.

I asked him why he went in for burglary, and he gave two answers. The first was, that the money came so easily, and the second was that he loved beauty. "I love art, beautiful things; I could never live on twenty-five bob a week," said he.

He had been in the later stages of the war and

PRISON NIGHTS

had been discharged practically deaf, rendered so by gun-fire. He would not admit that he had father, mother, or relatives living. He began his career of crime in quite a simple way and by accident, so to speak. He answered an advertisement for a boy at an estate agent's office in Baker Street. When he got to the office he was shown to the room of the boss. No one was there, and the till was open. He just gathered up the cash and went out smiling. This success so surprised him that he decided to try his fortune in this way; began calling on various firms, asking to see the head, and trusting to luck to get a chance to rob the establishment. On his own showing he was successful in about a score of robberies of this kind. His appearance was so attractive that he easily beguiled the various flappers who were to be found doing clerical work in the offices.

"I shall try to get a job when I come out, but I suppose I'll go back to the other; it's so easy."

He expressed his contempt for what he called the "Hoxton crowd," the shiftless, dirty, clumsy burglars and petty thieves. The door of his cell was finely marked with thumb-nail signatures of all sorts of men who had been there before. One name was reputed to be on twenty-four doors in Pentonville Prison. You had to look for it carefully, but it was there. Still, most of the names were just "Hoxton," said my young burglar, with withering contempt.

He had Ruskin's "Stones of Venice" out of the

prison library, but that was largely a pose. He was "superior." He had very little school education, and I doubt if life itself would teach a young fellow of his kind to like Ruskin. Still, time was heavy on his hands. He spent hours copying out passages of Ruskin on his slate, memorising them, and then copying out more. Ever and anon he looked at his dance-hall beauty from Holborn and said: "I will buy you beautiful things."

"Only, I'm afraid," said he to me one night, "she may not have the nerve to marry me. I promised her to reform and all that. Then if she turns me down, life will be so lonely. I remember last Christmas Eve standing in King's Cross tube station with all my pockets bulging with cash. I kept all I got on me. I had over a hundred pounds in my pockets, but I had not a friend in the world. I wanted to say to strangers: 'Come, be my friend, see, I've lots of money, let's have a good time'—but they were all going to their own homes, to Christmas trees and kids who were hanging up stockings. I felt as if I could go and hang myself."

I think this was the most uncommon type I met on my rounds. Another very remarkable case was a lachrymose young officer imprisoned for "soliciting." The chaplain asked me specially to see him. He was a prison choir-boy, who fondled the hymn-books and prayed a minute longer in chapel than any one else. "I don't know what to think. Is the man a fraud, or is it a case of genuine conversion?"

PRISON NIGHTS

said the chaplain. "You have a talk to him; see what you make of him."

He was one of the "victims." He claimed to be entirely innocent. He also had a fiancée who must not know. And there was a woman housekeeper who had befriended him. He had a good service record, but had been engaged addressing envelopes for a betting tout in the purlieus of Charing Cross, got into very bad society, and was arrested in a back street one night and charged with a disgusting offence. Clearly, he was a ruined man. Nothing is open to any one after such a conviction. I saw the housekeeper, a splendid, clear-cut, capable woman, and we put our heads together and decided that when he came out he must leave London at once. I got into touch with the fiancée, who lived some hundreds of miles away. She had money; he was to go straight to her. It seemed quite a romantic story, for I imagined some charming young girl in the background who would redeem him from error or accident—there is nothing that a woman who loves cannot forgive. I spent many an hour with the prisoner, trying to assure him that his "girl" would believe in him and would not throw him over. He seemed to have many misgivings about her. However, we got him swiftly and safely out of London. He was not allowed to meet by accident any of the frequenters of his former master's office. Nicely and cleanly dressed, he went to his fiancée. It seemed to be a good piece of work done. How-

ever, as I heard nothing of him for several months, I decided to look him up. So one night unexpectedly I called at the home of his fiancée. My experience only showed that an individual's life is the portal of mystery, and that imagination cannot always reveal that mystery to you. Every blind in the house was drawn, and there were no lights. It was a boarding-house of a kind, which the fiancée owned. When I rang the bell the ex-prisoner himself came to the door and seemed much abashed, but he led me to the basement, where he introduced me to the alleged "girl." She proved to be a dowdy, witch-like old woman, sitting over the remains of a fish supper. We had thought of a beautiful girl, behold a sodden-looking old dame, with grey hairs. Yes, his fiancée. What their real relationship was I did not ascertain, but she had put up the money for this scapegrace ex-officer, and he was now in possession of a small chemist's shop. He led me out at eleven o'clock, and he opened the shop, flooded it with electric light and showed me his goods. He was extremely effusive, but I left him with what may be called an empty mind. I would not now care to say what I think about him and his story. But I felt there was no limit to the lies and fantasies of the prison cell.

Key in hand, one walks meditatively along the stone galleries. In time one gets to know who lives in each cell; there is no need to open the door and look in. Each gallery is like a suburban street.

PRISON NIGHTS

Some of the prisoners have more room in a cell than they have in their homes. Some have a consolation in solitude when they sit at their little tables, with two hands about a big mug of steaming cocoa. It is a place for thinking, if men have the power of thought. A Bottomley, a Hobbs, may upon occasion have Shakespearian meditations. I could sense Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* from the other side of the cell door.

One night I slipped the bolt of a new room, and, seated in a corner of the grey cubicle was a man with characteristic military head, shaped like a bandbox. It was a Brigadier-General, in, so he said, through his wife, who had ordered all sorts of things in his name and got him into such pecuniary embarrassment that he had tried to obtain a loan by certain false representations of security. "I have three times seen my Division annihilated," said he. "I have fought in all my country's wars since 1882, yet here I am."

He was evidently going over the whole of his life in his mind.

Another fellow whom I met was a tramp, with thirty-two convictions. He was fifty, but had spent more than half his life in prison—the despair of magistrates, police, chaplains, visitors. Clear-eyed, spare-bodied, he paced up and down his cell—for exercise, but he looked like a wild beast. He often swore at visitors, but he seemed somehow more friendly to me. "My body is rotting away in these damned prisons," said he. "Why won't

LONDON NIGHTS

they leave me alone?" He told me he had never *earned* a living, and never would, as long as he lived.

Somehow he had more of my sympathy than the riff-raff of cocaine-sellers, fraudulent dole-lifters, bicycle stealers, and incorrigible "drunks" who occupied so many of the cells. But his way of living implied constant thieving, and he was in this time for snatching a bag. He will go out, take to the road again, get as far as St. Albans perhaps, and then fall into the hands of the law again. I advised him to stow away and go to the New World, where there was more space for the vagrant life, but in his perverse way he loved the country which did not love him.

One visitor was curiously perturbed by this tramp's independent demeanour. "What you want," he blurted out, "is a few strokes of the cat; that would bring you to your senses." At that the tramp fired up and used some very bad language, implying thereby that he hoped he might meet the visitor on a lonely road.

No chance of reformation there! He was on the basement corridor, with a lot of old gaol-birds, far from the star ward and the first offenders. Not a few of the hopeless cases proved unusually interesting, for there were bad mental complications. Here were humbugs, conspiracy-maniacs, garrulous liars, in plenty. I never realised how much lying had to do with crime and truth with its opposite. It is a fearful handicap to honest living.

PRISON NIGHTS

One or two disreputable fellows must always tell me they were public-school boys. "Cut that out," I would say. "It's going to do you no good." Another would say his sister was married to a peer. The worst of it was, they sought employment when they got out of gaol as ex-public-school boys connected with the peerage, rather than as plain "ornary" good-for-nothings, who have yet to take the first step towards earning an honest living. They lie seeking a job, lie at the Employment Exchange, lie when begging, lie when taking a room, lie to their mates. One can take no story for granted, but must check it detail by detail. In the long run, this takes too much time, and the ex-prisoner remains a pariah. He finds that he does not belong to the classes, but he belongs to a class—the outcasts.

Nevertheless, the actual prisons have been greatly improved. Much humanitarian work is accomplished. The world is kinder to the man in prison than to the same man out of prison. He has his concerts, lectures, gymnasiums, library, church service; in the workshops he often learns to make something useful, craftsmanship of a kind. Some learn to love work and beg to take their daily labour to their cells at night to go on with it there. Hope is sometimes enkindled in the modern prison, though it gets sadly dashed at the exit gate in the grey light of London's everyday.

Prison is the burglar's club, the great exchange of criminal experience. Many are glad to come

LONDON NIGHTS

back in order to get up to date, to know what is going on, and to make useful connections. Despite the rule of silence there is much conversation. That is the negative side of prison comfort. The positive lies in the lectures, the books, the genuine human interest, the prison civilisation.

One good institution much overlooked is the prison library. People who have good books to spare might do worse than send them to the prisons. Governor, Chaplain, and Schoolmaster are always most pleased at such acquisitions. More than half the prisoners read at nights, and while it is true they prefer to read about crimes, detectives, escapes, there are a number bent on self-improvement. Some give their time to hard study, and with the use of their slates make digests of useful information which they commit to memory. The lecturing work is also useful; I have lectured several times, and even conducted a sort of general debate. It is a lively type of evening. I took a Russian writer fresh from Bolshevik Russia with me one night, and he was tremendously impressed. He said to me in confidence: "It is the nearest approach to the gathering of the Moscow Soviet I have seen since I left the country; those faces, the soiled khaki, the red stars—just like the Soviet." I think he was able to tell his people something when he returned to Russia. For the revolution in Russia meant gaol-delivery, and to a great extent life-delivery for all the felons. Their first enemies in Russia were their warders; the

PRISON NIGHTS

second, society at large, and they wreaked their vengeance bloodily on both. I sometimes wonder what the criminals would do if they had the "respectable" people in their power.

That, however, seems an idle speculation inside the strong, serene interior of a London prison. It is a human Zoo, all the birds and animals of prey are in their cages and many of them have had claws cut and talons drawn. They are harmless and defeated. There is only one lasting delusion, which is, that we can tame them and make them domestic and useful. They go out at given intervals, but are nearly always sent back. In and out they swarm, the many thousands of them "known to the police."

In the Churchyards

THE truth of that oft-repeated sentence: "One half of London does not know how the other half lives" was borne in upon me forcibly the other evening. I watched a man with a bag of fishes' heads trying to coax the stray cats of High Street, Bloomsbury, to come and feed from him. But as most of the cats were sleeping on the tombs of St. Giles he followed into the churchyard and began to call: "Puss, puss, mew, mew." Three women were sitting on a bench there, and one had her hair down and was combing it with a broken comb, one was asleep with her chin on her bosom, but the third was watching.

"Wot is it?" she cried to the man with the bag. "Don't give it to the cats; give it ter me. I 'aven't 'ad a bite since mornin'. Garn, don't give it to the cats."

"Not fit to eat," said the man with the bag.

"Is it cats' meat?" asked the woman. "Give it 'ere."

But the man went on and called the cats, who left the grave of "unparalleled Pendrell," succourer of King Charles in the oak tree, left the playground where children romp over what was once the "plague pit" of St. Giles, and leisurely and suspiciously approached the bag and sniffed at it, not nearly so ready to take what was in it as the outcast woman on the bench.

Another vision of poverty and degradation!

IN THE CHURCHYARDS

The prodigal son would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and the prodigal daughter is ready to take food from the cats. The scene at St. Giles set me thinking about our London churchyards, and some which I know quite well I visited afresh. Indeed, for a few days whenever I came to a church I walked round it and had a look at its churchyard, and I realised that the function of many of these pleasant or solemn little squares and courts is to be an afternoon parlour for those whose bedroom is the Embankment.

Most of them are municipalised and have little to do with the Church authority. They are tiny public gardens, but as that was not their original intention they are not quite recognised as such by the ordinary public. They are not on the way to anywhere in particular. Who is going to Church Passage from High Street? Who is going to stray from busy Wardour Street into the back garden of St. Anne's, Soho? Only those whose leisure has allowed them to discover such pleasant places. And, after all, those who have most leisure in London are those who have no occupation—the tramps and the vagrants.

St. Anne's churchyard is a pleasant and somnolent island. It is lifted above the lights and the waiting cars and theatre crowds of one of the gayest corners of the West End. The church is beautiful, and you see it best when you climb up the Wardour Street steps and look at it across the

LONDON NIGHTS

lawns. As you stand under the old memorial of Theodore, King of Corsica, and survey the occupants of the benches, you realise the seventeenth century asleep in the midst of the twentieth.

I suppose the most wonderful of the churchyards is that of St. Botolph Without, Aldersgate, a secluded green vale in the midst of our asphalted city, sometimes called "Postmen's Park." Here, amid old trees, tombs, a sundial, and a fountain, is a memorial wall and shelter where deeds of famous Londoners are commemorated on tiled plaques. Tired people sit with their backs against a wall which tells otherwise only of stirring action—thus, of "Mary Rogers, stewardess of the *Stella*, who sacrificed her life-belt and went down with the sinking ship;" thus of William Drake, who in 1869 stopped a pair of runaway horses in Hyde Park and saved two ladies' lives but lost his own.

Sparrows wash in the fountain and flutter their feathers; postmen off duty hobnob together; homeless people sit and snore.

"My word! It is terribly difficult to find a place to take a rest in London," said a rich man to me recently. "I paid sixpence and went into the National Portrait Gallery and had an hour's rest this afternoon. It was the only place I could think of." But poorer people could have told him where to have a good rest in even pleasanter surroundings: take a taxi to Postmen's Park, you can put in a pleasant hour there. It is better than the

IN THE CHURCHYARDS

habit of some old tramps who go into a public library and ask for one of the monthly reviews. If St. Botolph Without, Aldersgate, is hard to locate, St. Botolph, Bishopsgate, at least cannot be missed, and is better than any waiting-room in Liverpool Street Station near by.

Unfortunately, however, not every church is so hospitable. St. James's, Piccadilly, has a great deal of space in its churchyard. It has a handsome external pulpit, and it has lawns and trees, but it has few seats, and does not encourage the public. A substantial and forbidding brick wall runs along in front of it and entry is by a little gate. Its high plane trees rejoice chiefly the dwellers in upper storeys in Jermyn Street.

The church certainly suffers by having a wall between it and a surging humanity of the Piccadilly pavements. It reminds me of the saying of a repentant sinner in a novel: "I believe I could have got to God much sooner, but the churches somehow always seemed standing in my way; they were so forbidding. I felt they were clubs, and you had to be members to enter."

What a contrast to St. James's, Piccadilly, is St. Peter's, Windmill Street, which has no churchyard, and stands perpetually in the crush of Piccadilly Circus, and seems to say all the while: "Don't push me; give me room!" Or St. Ethelburga's, at the other end of the town, with its porch front let out in shops; or wonderful St. Bride's, perched high on a square of dead tar-

LONDON NIGHTS

pavement, dotted with stunted trees; or even St. Helen's, with its plots of red tulips and yellow gravel and all the City masonry about it crowded to the very kerb of the roadways.

I believe the churches ought jealously to guard their yards and at the same time let the world know more about them. How beautiful and refreshing by day, how still by night is the green square behind St. Paul's, Covent Garden, but few busy people spare a moment to look in and see the quiet annexe to the church, the tired people's refuge away at the church back door! I have heard the phrase used: "Look at that beautiful church: that church is my sanctuary," and the church, or at least the churchyard, is sanctuary to many.

The vicars, perhaps also the police, would no doubt like to be rid of the tired denizens who sit thus among the tombs. But I daresay many would have overlooked the rest of the life of those they call loafers. When dawn filters into dark on the Embankment a host of homeless people who have spent a cold, sleepless night slink away to the early markets and to the quest of stray bits of food in dustbins. They make a bold bid for something in the nature of a breakfast. With wan faces they meet the throngs of the awakened, healthy, happy people coming from homes and soft beds. And at about ten in the morning many give up for the day and repair to places where they can

IN THE CHURCHYARDS

sit undisturbed and get that sleep which was not theirs during the night.

Thus in the parks and open squares and in the curious hidden-away churchyards of London they find something which they lost in the night and a charity which is otherwise denied them.

Human Derelicts

IN a book written in 1859 it is stated as a common belief that there were 70,000 persons who rose each morning in London without the slightest knowledge as to where they would lay their heads at night. Population has greatly increased since those days; poverty also has broadened out; but the number of the homeless has not manifestly increased. The city still has a very large number. A census taken by L.C.C. representatives on February 20th, 1925, showed only a hundred out-of-door sleepers and some 14,425 people in doss-houses, etc. As regards the shelterless, some technicality in classification must have shut the eyes of the counters. One individual could rout out a hundred or so, if he knew where to look. The derelicts are not all on the Embankment. Still, however it was in 1859, one could not say to-day that one in fifty of our women is a drab and one in fifty of our men an "Embankment tramp." The number includes thousands who eke out a poor living but are homeless through sheer lack of homes. The saturated inner areas of London, like King's Cross, are shedding men and women daily. And these become casual sleepers, wanderers from doss-house to doss-house. They could conceivably be decently provided for. They are not derelicts. As time goes on they tend to enter that hopeless class and become incapable of having homes even were homes possible to find.

HUMAN DERELICTS

Doss-house life is very demoralising, especially for women, where the more respectable are degraded to one level by the foul language and bad ways of life of the lowest. It is said that once a man or woman takes to sleeping in doss-houses he rarely settles down again to home life.

In my opinion, the force which most commonly reduces the doss-house migrant to the shelterless stage is drink. The American experiment of Prohibition has caused an almost complete disappearance of homeless persons from the cities. Even the lowest can somehow pick up enough money to pay for a night's lodging if he can save the coppers. One does not become a Morgan by selling matches or begging, but it has been proved again and again that money is certain to come to beggar and hawker. The more disreputable the beggar the more he earns, and the more perhaps he drinks. One cannot but feel sorry for the sleepers on the Embankment. But their homelessness does not simply represent human lack of charity or kindness; it indicates more often the moral failure of the sleeper.

My wife and I went down one winter night to the Embankment with a bottle of port and a large, much-almonded Dundee cake from the Pâtisserie Belge. It was cold and wet, and it was Christmas, but the usual desperate crowd had their places on the benches facing the river.

I waked them up one by one and proffered cake and wine. No one cursed my impertinence. No

LONDON NIGHTS

one said: "Leave me alone to my dreams." No, so far as the wine was concerned, they heard the word with gladness. Not one of those we tended but was worse for drink; not one refused another glass. As regards the cake, they seemed not particularly interested. They had grown disaccustomed to cake, and the almonds did not suit their bad teeth.

"Thanks, mate! But to tell you the truth I ain't got much appetite, blowed if I 'ave. I'll just put this 'ere in my pocket. Perhaps I might feel I wanted it ter-morrow mornin'."

They liked the wine. I asked a constable who came to watch us if he thought I was justified in giving one of them a drink. But the policeman said nothing. He just stared at the "down and out" with gleaming eyes. And he, a diminutive, shabby fellow with a bit of a grey face, cringed.

"I do need just suthin to pull meself togedder like," said he, eyeing the bottle.

I came up to another, stalwart, red-faced, with big eyes staring out into the night. He said not a word. He did not consider me. I might have given him poison; it would have been all the same. He took the glass from my hand, turned the wine down his throat, handed the glass back, and went on staring.

Another man, lying shrunken and dishevelled like a battlefield corpse, proved to be quite drunk. He lay "neck and crop" in the half of a seat, with his face to the back. I roused him up foolishly

HUMAN DERELICTS

to give him something with which to warm his bones. He drank avidly; he refused the cake.

"Don' think as I 'aven't got a 'ome," said he. "I live over Walworth way, but they stood me a few drinks. That's 'ow it was. I didn't feel as 'ow I cud fin' me way 'ome. So I jus' settled down 'ere to sober up."

One wondered what sort of a home it was "over Walworth way" where they waited or didn't wait this drunk.

Another whom we regaled had been stirred up twice by a policeman and made to sit instead of lying down. "The Church Army is providing beds for all to-night," said the policeman. "No money is taken. Good warm beds and a breakfast in the morning. Now you pack off there, d'ye hear!" said he.

The man rubbed his eyes. "But I've always slept 'ere," said he disconsolately. "You might see me on this bench any night for years. I don't want any bed . . . no fit state."

"You get along. If you aren't gone by the time I return on my beat next I'll take you there myself."

So saying, without humour, the fine, upstanding Bobby went on, and the seedy old lodger of the Embankment remained in some perplexity. He seemed to lack the will to move, and so there he stayed, till the policeman came again and forced him to go.

After drink, the next cause of homelessness is

LONDON NIGHTS

immorality. Many of the derelicts are lepers of a kind. The immoral, while healthy, can always find a sheltering; women will take men in, men will take women in. But there comes a time when the ravages of disease drive the unfortunates out of doors. Their state is known, and they are not wanted anywhere. One may say with assurance there are few potential fathers and mothers of healthy children wandering London at night.

My attention was called to a tall, strange woman, a habitual drab, to be seen crouching and sleeping in courts or church porches. One morning she was observed lying in Hyde Park with her head on a newspaper, in the pouring rain. Her slight clothes were soaked through. But she did not care, had long ceased to care. Being wet was but a slight trouble to her. Most of the women in her plight are not only ruined body and soul but are pariahs as well, and know that their presence is a physical danger to those who come near them. So with dreadful patience they live their outcast lives till they die.

The great war gave us more derelicts; it brutalised, incapacitated, demoralised. We have still to reap the harvest of the war upon the streets of London. Our prison system is also making derelicts. There is less chance nowadays for a man when he comes out of prison. He is desocialised whilst he is in gaol. All goes wrong in his absence from home. His effects are frequently sold up or turned into the roadway. Landlords gladly



AT AN EAST END SHELTER

HUMAN DERELICTS

regain their property, and he receives "the key of the street." He comes out of prison with the Prisoners' Aid Society's half-crown and a few tickets for doss-house beds. But he is dole-less, homeless and job-less. The under-world has a great power to drag him to it, and he has seldom much moral stay or power of resistance.

However, the workaday world dawns on the wilderness of London at night. The jackals slink away. We do not think of them; ignore them. Ours to live; theirs to die. But in our political devotion to London, in our desire to pull down the slums and rebuild them nearer to the heart's desire, I believe we overlook the real tragedy of London: the dead, the derelicts, the under-dogs, the creatures that once were men, the people who have fallen out of the bottom of our human society. The nameless fear of many men and women is that they might eventually become one of these. If not always in our minds it is more often in our consciousness. It is London's waiting hell. The bottom falls out of Shaftesbury Avenue, and you see the under-world. Why should we not be allowed to attack the prime causes of this sin and shame—drink and immorality?

At Toynbee Hall

SOME of the hottest evenings of my life have been spent at Toynbee Hall, holding a platform against a seething crowd of East End debaters. That is how I first visited the settlement, talking of the Russia that I loved and facing fearful odds.

"Now, then," the chairman used to say constantly to the obstreperous denizens of Aldgate. "Give the speaker a chance; remember the traditions, remember the traditions."

The eagerness, the combativeness, the acumen of the young Jew were always a source of delight to me, and sometimes of some mirth.

Since those days I have become in a way a friend of Toynbee, or, rather, Toynbee has become a friend to me. I always feel at home there, and I have become more and more convinced of the enormous value of the settlement as a humanising and educative mission in the East End.

Call it what you will—an outpost of the Universities in the slums, a bridge-head on the Vistula, a mission-house in a darkest London every whit as dark as darkest Africa.

It is the oldest of the settlements, yet it is absolutely contemporary and up to date. It is as old and no older than I am myself. And it is the greatest, it is the parent institution, the original. Even in America, where settlement work is done on a very large scale with a covetable backing of

AT TOYNBEE HALL

dollars, the salute of the workers is to Toynbee Hall. The Americans think very affectionately and fraternally of Toynbee.

Go there any night in the week, it is a marvellous hive of activity. It may be the Billingsgate fish-porters are holding a meeting of the Union, those extraordinary fellows with the gutter and spout in their hats to let the fish water flow away. Fifty trade unions hold their meetings at Toynbee.

It may be the warders of Pentonville Prison are having a social gathering. The grey reflex of their dreary work has gone from their faces, and in a more home-like atmosphere they forget their keys, their prisoners, the cells and the cages, and, lifting Toynbee teacups, think and talk of new ideals. Somewhere else a committee of dockers are discussing their troubles. Or a mass meeting of American visitors is holding a convention.

And all the while the normal activities of the settlement are in full swing. Language classes are in progress—French, German, Russian. The Workers' Travel Association is attending to a queue of people who want to go to France or Germany or Austria. This is an enormous success. Many hundreds of East Enders are getting cheap European holidays under the auspices of Toynbee and being shown what is interesting sociologically in foreign countries at the same time—a great education.

In another part of the building classical

LONDON NIGHTS

dancing-classes are in progress with teachers from the Margaret Morris school. Some thirty beautiful Jewesses are being taught Greek dances; many children also are learning morris dancing.

How diverse are the activities! While light and airy dance bids one part of humanity be happy, another part is sitting down to discuss legal troubles, injuries, grievances, aided by three idealistic young lawyers, who give free legal aid to the litigious and the unfortunate. In another hall the Dramatic Society is producing, reciting, acting. Readings from Shakespeare are in progress.

But at the same time, in other parts of the settlement, athletics are in full swing. The hard tennis-courts are never empty. And the first-aid classes are always well attended. Toynbee Hall holds the All-London Cup for Ambulancy awarded by the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem.

Some of the most valuable work is that done by the "Skilled Employment Committee," who get the names of boys and girls leaving school, interview them and their parents, and try to get them into the sort of work that is likely to suit them best.

"The chief thing we try to avoid," said Mr. Catchpool to me, "is blind-alley employment. We think it best for a child to start in a firm where there will be scope for him when he grows to manhood." If a boy shows an aptitude for practical mechanics they try to get him into some place like ships' engineers. If he can draw or design,

AT TOYNBEE HALL

they try to place him with a jeweller, or, say, an architect.

Another interesting service which Toynbee has taken on is that of their class for hopeless mental defectives. They take a number of those children whom neither school nor home seems able to deal with, and make individual studies of them, and frequently, I am assured, they make interesting discoveries regarding these "dull" children—they find gates to life for them.

It is true they have the care of the children only from 2 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. each day, but even at the lowest estimate the work done with them at least relieves the poor families to which they belong. A mentally defective child is often a terrible burden on a mother living in a slum dwelling.

Of course, all this work could not be done without a good deal of devotion. The workers are splendid fellows. What happier occasion could one wish than to meet them at the common board at Toynbee at seven of an evening and ask the question which Matthew Arnold put to the preacher "in the squalid streets of Bethnal Green"—"*How fare you in this scene?*" You always get the smiling answer, "*Bravely!*"

They are mostly young men drawn from the Universities. The bond with Oxford and Cambridge is a strong one. Undergraduates often come down to visit. Twice a year there are special undergraduate parties of fifty or so who

LONDON NIGHTS

come to see how the settlement works. They are boarded there, and with it as a base shown the problems of night life and the slums. Some brave fellows last year insisted on sleeping every night in an East End doss-house, just to see what it was like.

On the other hand, Toynbee workers descend upon Oxford and Cambridge at times, and stir up life in the Colleges, form groups, tell their story, and thus keep the fires of practical idealism burning in the hearts of the youth of the nation.

An especially good point about Toynbee is that it never turns away from any who can help. It has no clique or set, no conventions or exclusiveness. Nominally High Church, it is beloved of the Quakers. The sub-warden himself is a "Friend"; it has no politics, it welcomes Conservative idealism, Liberal idealism, Labour idealism.

It takes newspapers and reviews of all shades of opinion. It would be equally hospitable to George Lansbury and the Duke of Northumberland, to Mr. Seebohm Rowntree or the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is without quarrels, without animosities. The married—there are nine flats for married residents—seem to mingle happily with the single, and occasional visitors are as much at home as long-time habitués. There is no distinction of old-timers.

Much is due to the genial and capable mind of Mallon, the Warden, and more still to the actual spirit of the walls of Toynbee. And there is great

AT TOYNBEE HALL

scope for any man who wishes to devote himself to his fellow-men. You can teach, you can visit the prisons, you can do research work. You can go "zoning" with the brotherhood. You can conduct parties abroad. You can visit schools, parents, employers, factories, wharves, poor streets, slums, Salvation Army shelters, licensed doss-houses.

I do not mean that every one can do these things and do them profitably. It needs some apprenticeship, but above all it needs a devoted loving human heart, ready to share with the unfortunate a little of the rough side of life and so keep the flag flying where most things that are bright get trodden under foot.

Coming Home from the Derby

ALL looked like winners. Scarcely a gloomy face was to be seen in all the gay crowd flooding away from the Downs. It was a miracle of good humour.

"I'll say it was the jockey's race. Wonderful fellow, Steve!"

"I didn't bet on the horse; I bet on Donnyhee. 'E'd a won on any of 'em."

"Gor-blimey; didn't I tell yer, Donnygew."

"Donog's third Derby."

"I thought Far-orse would a-won. I backed Far-orse for a place. 'Ard luck on Lord Derby, ain't it?"

In all the homing cars and carts were loads of people becoming momentarily more hilarious as the pedestrians greeted them. Half the people wore jockey's hats of coloured paper. Purple and primrose were common colours. Many old ladies carried lurid paper parasols. Inflated balloons and sausages in bright hues fluttered in the air above cars and buses. There were taxis full of coster-girls, who sang all the way they went.

Nearly every car had its mascot. In one car every man had a false nose of red cardboard and a dripping moustache of grey wool. An immense red brake called "Sunshine" was occupied by fierce-looking ringlety girls in old top hats, and they sang as they went and rallied the crowd below. Private buses joined the vast parade,

COMING HOME FROM THE DERBY

crowned by the inevitable pilot musician blasting the quiet air of Surrey with the voice of his clarionet.

From the top of one bus gay girls fished among the crowds below with fishing-poles and strings to which were attached india-rubber babies. Another bus bore a chorus party having long squeaking horns, with which they told the world that they were glad. But I suppose the cleverest and most original turn-out for home was that of a taxi-cab of happy damsels, who bore a huge paper effigy of Donoghue in his own colours. Above it was written "Steve" and below in large letters, "There's a Jockey on every Horse!"

Thus they left the Downs, the cars by certain ways, the horse vehicles by another. I walked among the mokes and nags toiling along the country lanes with their immense, sprawling, human burdens, and I stopped with them at various public-houses. That meant drinks and dances and singing inside and outside little beer-houses, and, incidentally, a needed rest for the animals. Some of the horse-drawn vehicles will be most of the night on the road.

Of course, there remained at Epsom many thousands—the "rough sort," as the police call them, "sleeping under the 'edges." Fires by the wayside show the tribe of beggars, musicians, petty tipsters, ex-match-sellers, ex-pavement-artists, vagrants, casuals. Few outcasts are sleeping on the Embankment this week; they are

LONDON NIGHTS

sleeping on Epsom Downs instead. "We have here," said a burly and indignant policeman, "the off-scourings of London, and they make all Epsom smell." However, they have my sympathy. Epsom week is their holiday, their real joy week. It means as much to them as it can do to any who go.

But the roads from Surrey to London were choked. Elegantly-attired women talked glibly to their gloved and silk-hatted men, seated in fine cars, but close upon them tooted and grinded and clattered taxis, Fords, drays, buses, laundry-vans, with all sorts and conditions of men. When the foot-passengers thinned out, the motor parties cheered one another and sang choruses. But every village was out of doors to watch the traffic go past.

In the white mist and drizzle and the twilight in the little Surrey villages on the way to London, the children and the grown-ups all stood outside their dingy cottages of brick, and shouted to the moving throng:

"Hooray, hooray! Throw out your mouldy coppers! Throw out your mouldy coppers!"

And clink, clink, on to the roadway, into the crowds, flew the pennies and ha'pence. Some passengers must actually have laid up a store of small coin to indulge in this treat and amusement.

Those who had backed Papyrus were prodigal, and when their pennies were gone they flung silver. They stopped and harangued the crowds,

COMING HOME FROM THE DERBY

and had beer handed to them, and gave three rousing cheers for Donoghue—the hero of the hour.

I heard of various winnings—fifteen hundred pounds, sixty pounds, four bob, a tanner. Talk of amounts of money, of bets, of odds, floated towards the green hedges from wind-blown faces and flaming eyes.

A great sensation was made on the road by a two-horse van belonging to a “merchant of skins and rugs,” for in it was a party of costers and four girls of the Liza-of-Lambeth type in bright, chestnut-coloured bloomers. I think they may have been a barrel-organ troupe, but they evoked salvoes of mirthful cheers from all the gay motor-driving crowds who passed them.

Whenever there was a momentary traffic-jam the street-children would climb the wheels of the vehicles, asking for coppers.

At Croydon the children’s chorus became rampageous, and could be heard streets away. There were hundreds of urchins, not all of Croydon; many had come down thus far from Brixton and Wandsworth, to meet the incoming tide from the race:

“Throw out yer mouldy!”

“Out with it!”

“Thr-aoh aout yer mouldy!”

“Thr-aoh!”

Boys and girls fought on the wet streets for the coins. Little girls with woollen caps clambered on to brakes and ’buses to despoil all and sundry.

LONDON NIGHTS

"How much yer got naoh, Blackie?"

"I got a shillin' just."

"Aoh, Flo, ye took that from Daisy. You got more'n 'er now."

"Here they come; here they come; oo-ooray!"

Out of the wet twilight into the dark, into damp Suburbia, into Inner London—they all poured. They say men coming from the Derby, in moments of libation, have been known to hand over large sums for charity, and that they are often met by representatives of hospitals, churches, and the like. It may be. Easy come, easy go. No one seems to want to hold on to what they have won.

But I hear it said, "After all, it was a bookies' Derby. They did best of all out of it, and no mistake." Curiously enough, I scarcely heard one word about the erstwhile favourite, Town Guard. It is as if that horse never existed. Yet he was heavily backed. People don't say much about it when they've backed a horse and lost.

One man in a public-house averred that he had backed Papyrus but lost his betting ticket, and he was getting free drinks on the strength of it. Papyrus won, but he lost his papyrus, so to speak. There was endless chaff in the bars of South London, and such crowds. The police had a difficult job at closing-time.

But when the public-houses closed the coffee-stalls and fried-fish shops throve. Not only did vehicles stop outside fried-fish shops and the grown-ups go in and eat. But those boy and girl

COMING HOME FROM THE DERBY

gleaners of coin went in too with their so-called mouldy coppers, and bought their fish and chips. Banjo players kept girls and men dancing outside. Musicians of various kinds played to the company inside stationary buses.

Even in Kennington you could see much that you might miss at Epsom: horses with white ostrich-feathers at their ears; drivers made up as jockeys of the day; whole families rigged up in coloured paper, blissfully singing their way home, drawn by the patient moke.

And so Derby night! Sounds of revelry in Soho, loud girls' laughter in the dance clubs, watchful but non-interfering policemen on the London streets, crowds at the late bars eating a sandwich with their drinks, great horses and noble owners and happy winning jockeys somewhere in the background. Also on the roads the stragglers, and on the Downs the vagrants, the rough sort, sleeping under the hedges! After all, they got home first, and probably slept longest.

The Café Bars

AT the back of theatre-world one finds the Bohemian resorts of London: the night clubs, the cosy little supper restaurants, and the café bars. In recent years there has been a remarkable growth of the little foreign resorts in the purlieus of Leicester Square and of Soho. I refer to the "café bars." More or less asleep during the daylight hours, they are thronged at midnight. There must be thirty or forty of them in London now, and they are nearly all foreign.

Their furniture includes chairs and tables, but the chief feature is generally a mahogany-coloured horseshoe or lemon-shaped bar, behind which Frenchwomen and Italians dispense refreshments, talking in English but calculating in their own tongue. The bars are named fantastically "Au Chat Noir," "Roma," "Caiffa," "Venice," "The Wooden Soldier," "Round the Clock," or prosaically just by numbers. Thus, there is Café Bar No. 10 in Denman Street, or Café No. 21, in Frith Street, in imitation of certain night clubs which, instead of naming themselves, just take the number of the street in which they are located—thus, the "Forty-three Club," "Club 60," etc.

Great Windmill Street is one of the capitals of all-night pleasure, and if one wanders up that narrow Soho lane just after the theatres empty, to the corner where the clock of the Red Lion

THE CAFÉ BARS

public-house shows the witching hour of night, one is in the midst of foreign Bohemian life.

The back exit of the Lyric Theatre is flanked by the charming "Stage Door" resort, served by theatrical ladies, and also by the Armenian café, with its clanking of dominoes and its Easterns sipping thick Turkish coffee. Here, on racks, range red fezes for those who wish to become Turks or Tartars for the evening; the narghile and the hookah are at your disposal, and you may exchange at a step the atmosphere of Shaftesbury Avenue for the atmosphere of Smyrna or Constantinople. The later the hour the more the company. Opposite is the "Roma," a comfortable little bar where chorus girls and supers often resort to discuss their domestic troubles and rivalries over a cup of coffee and a bun. Then there is the "Cercle Gaulois," which accommodates, amongst others, the Blue Hall Workers' Union, whose banner, hanging from an upper window, sags in the damp air and rain.

This is Archer Street. Opposite the "Red Lion," which is on the corner of this street and Great Windmill Street, is the entrance to a little blind alley called Ham Yard, a place of great activity. At first sight you think it is merely the entrance to a garage. But it is something very much more. It is one of the chief centres of night club life. There is a sort of garage: it seems to be called the "Night Club Garage"; you can put up a car there for a few hours for a shilling or so.

LONDON NIGHTS

Bobbies recommend it. But when you follow a car in by the narrow way you come into a gaily-lighted open court which is jingling with music and song, while, overhead, laughter and the noise of merriment surges upward to the dull sky. One establishment in this place is the "Pavilion Club," another is called the "Last Club." There is the friendly and genial "Ham and Bone Club." There may be others; but perhaps the various entrances and exits are merely conveniences of the clubs named. London youth rolls up to dance and sing. The cars climb Windmill Street tooting and coughing, and make the difficult entry, and then empty their gay passengers, often straight from the footlights and the dressing-rooms, often from the large cafés of the Circus: the Royal, the Imperial, the Monico. Hawkers come up to sell matches and to beg. The roast-chestnut men wheel their glowing barrows up to the entrance to the yard. Loungers wait and watch. The police stand and consider and sometimes take notes. Of course, the night club's interior and style is well known now. It has been so often described. Plenty of reputable people go to night clubs; men even take their wives, though sometimes the latter get rather shocked. One told me one night how piqued she felt when a powdered "instructress" in a frill came and sat engagingly upon her husband's knee. That, however, was not in Ham Yard, but at a place since closed by the police.

The little booths where they sell refreshments,

THE CAFÉ BARS

at the very doors of the night club, are more novel, and are growing in number. There is one in this curious garage yard. It is called a café bar, and it remains open all night. It does a thriving trade in sirops and coffees. Its custom is curious. It is in a way a sort of information bureau. Go in there, get into talk with the folk who are drinking and arguing, and you can find out all you need to know about the night life of the district. There, as in many of the others, is that spark of excitement which distinguishes the place from the mere tea-shop. The romance of the all-night coffee-stall has been kept, and something has been added.

The frescoes of Egypt or the East on the walls, the bursts of jazz music from the night clubs, the tooting of the motor-horns, the laughter of the women, the lateness of the hour, all conspire to make the café bar a fascinating place.

Some of the bars are, of course, much more domestic, others more foreign. The "Chat Noir," with its black cat mascot in the window, in Old Compton Street, seems to be becoming more of a family resort in the French style. Men and women go in and sit for hours together, not simply to have some French coffee, but to converse. It is their parlour. Even the men who lounge across the mahogany bar seem to be there because their homes are uncomfortable. They come to be at home. The "Salle de degustation de meilleur café," in Frith Street, is also of this kind. No. 21,

LONDON NIGHTS

opposite, is an Italian headquarters. It is crammed with people, many of them Italians. A large picture of the ruins of the Colosseum dominates the bar. There are photographs of the Italian Sports Union members on the walls, and notices of various conversaciones and boxing matches.

Some bars are merely the front rooms of seventeenth-century dwelling-houses, hardly capable of holding more than twenty people; rooms with panelled walls and fine old fireplaces. The windows are heavily curtained, outsiders and strangers do not seem to be entirely welcome. The customers seem to be habitués, all fairly well known to one another. These are little talking clubs. Some are devoted to cards, some to dominoes. Notices on the walls forbid gambling. But of course gambling takes place in some of them, whether the management oppose it or not.

I went into one at the back of Piccadilly Circus—a mere box of a room. On the walls were impressionist pictures of negroes and white girls, not, I should say, in good taste, from an American point of view at least. For one does not care to see pictures of sportive coloured men mashing white girls, even when the latter do seem to belong to the under-world. This bar was crowded with Jewish youth, mostly in their teens and early twenties. There were dark, Yiddish-speaking flappers at the back, calling out numbers, perhaps

THE CAFÉ BARS

in a game of lotto. When I came into the place, all stared at me—as if apprehensive of strangers. But I sat down quietly to a cup of bad coffee, and listened to the talk. Well-known street girls came in and out and chattered with the boys. One sat at my table, almost on top of my cup of coffee. She crossed her knees, lit a cigarette and blew smoke into the faces of the hobbledehoys, who were lifting her silk-stockinged legs and trying to unbalance her off the table.

This was “Babs,” and she went out presently with a banana in her hand, bought at the bar.

At the café bars you do not need an introduction to start a conversation. It is well to be on the alert. Many who live by their wits find such places useful. It is not simply “Babs” who wants a banana, but also the man who sponges on Babs. The most curious resorts at the back of theatre-land are not the lighted-up. You may easily strike up a conversation with a pleasant-seeming Italian or other foreigner who is ready to take you up the dark streets to a private den, some of them the queerest and most unlikely sort of places. One I know is an empty house, long since boarded up and padlocked. You enter by a ladder from a place where a van is kept. In that way you get on to the first floor. You climb the dank, dark stairs, and in a shuttered top-back room heavily hung with old muslin curtains you are introduced to a small but select company of sharpers. A

LONDON NIGHTS

person with a cool head can go anywhere. But I often think, as I see tenderfoot youth surging up from the stage-doors and back ways of theatre-land, that there are more risks than the gaiety and innocence of the bars would suggest.

Soho and Night Clubs

INTEREST was directed during the winter of 1925 to night clubs by a deputation to the Home Secretary of people interested in public morals and temperance. Mr. Joynson Hicks, in answering them, said that the police were working with one hand tied behind their backs, and he promised to introduce a measure to define just exactly what night clubs are. For there was no distinction in law between a working man's club, the Carlton, and a duly registered night resort.

As I live in the midst of the night club district, and one of my neighbours is the Rector of St. Anne's, one of the speakers in the deputation, perhaps I may state a frank, personal opinion on the matter.

First of all, it should be said that the chief objection to some night clubs is not drunkenness, but immorality; not the technical infringement of the licensing laws, but vice. There are, of course, several respectable night clubs to which any one may go and to which any one may be taken. But there are others much frequented by vicious people. All are run sheerly for money, and vice sells for more than virtue. A number of the women at the clubs are professionals—though their profession is somewhat overrun with amateurs. Public freedom in matters of sex has greatly increased since the war, and the police have no mandate to interfere. After all, the

authorities were responsible for certain entertainment for British soldiers in the proximity of base-camps in France, and it lent its countenance to the natural man satisfying a natural appetite. It was the Army's point of view, unwise perhaps, but not thought much of during the war. It frustrated the puritans. The would-be cleaners-up of England have never been able to get such a way on as in America.

London at night has become much more Parisian since the war. And under cover of this gaiety there has been an increase in vice. We have the ex-soldier who learned something in France—"Once he had been to gay Paree, how're gonna keep him down on the farm?" as the song says. There is also the rich American who cannot stand "God's own country" without liquor. There is a fair number of Orientals and of South Americans who make London their headquarters for pleasure. They are a well-lined crowd; they attract swarms of hangers-on. The night club proprietor is a shrewd business man of a kind intent on getting rich quick. He has his vicious clientèle of gamblers, tricksters, and painted birds. The Bishop of London calls the night club "a hunting-ground of sharks and loose women." To a certain extent he is right. The social evil lies in the vice and the pitfalls rather than in the expensive drinks at three o'clock in the morning. It is vice which the serious social workers wish to stem, not the conviviality.

SOHO AND NIGHT CLUBS

In New York, some girls in pyjamas, a man at a piano, and a "Madam," constitute a characteristic establishment on Upper Broadway or Sixth Avenue. The police raid such a place for immorality, and little is said concerning any prohibited drinks which may be found on the premises. In London we raid a brothel and charge the keepers of it with selling liquors after hours. We merely fine people who are known to be public pests; we strike their clubs off the list; we make premises legally unavailable as club rooms for a space of time. But the objectionable club, changing its name and its place, springs up again and again. You can always learn the change of address from the ladies of the cafés.

As one who lives in Soho, I see a good deal of the night-club traffic. Once, even, a night club occupied premises at the back of those I occupy. Happily, it has been suspended, and has gone elsewhere. There were apparently a series of dives and retreats. I once went on the Soho roofs with a detective from Great Marlborough Street, and we looked on certain well-known tracks leading to open attic windows where you dropped into little rooms and thence passed into other houses. It used to be rather amusing to watch girls in the scantiest attire come out on the roof and disport themselves on summer mornings. But one cursed them roundly after midnight for their insensate music and loud vulgar laughter. Giggles and jazz are a bad combination.

LONDON NIGHTS

It is a densely-populated neighbourhood. The night life has an evil influence on youth. Dancing and finery are strong attractions to the Soho girl. It is easy to get into a doubtful way of life. I see a large advertisement posted on the house next door to a well-known Lock hospital. It will be opened shortly as a dancing establishment. Dance is the lure to night life. Who is to warn the young girl of the moral danger, the cocaine danger, the gambling danger, when she steps across the threshold of the capital of pleasure? She resents interference; thinks she can very well take care of herself. A worker in one of the Soho factories, perhaps, she has only half a time as a worker. She backs horses at the call of the street bookies who run in and out of the small historic public-houses of the neighbourhood. She falls in with no-account men who take her out, and she easily glides into the night-club vortex. Soon she may find a man living on her novel earnings. There is a shocking leniency towards men living on the earnings of women, and such men hang on in plenty to the night clubs.

I imagine the reason why local bodies, such as the Charing Cross Vigilance Society, horrible name, take action is because they are much interested in the Boy Scout and Girl Guide movement. The Marquis of Salisbury takes an especial interest in this. The Scouts of St. Anne's, Soho, bear the proud title of the Marquis of Salisbury's Own. Their training is entirely along lines of

SOHO AND NIGHT CLUBS

cleanness of living, and they and the Guides are a body whose interests have a considerable force in argument. Soho, in fact, is strongly opposed to the night clubs, and would gladly see them moved outside London altogether. The Rolls-Royces, axle-deep in decaying cabbage leaves and litter, obstruct Berwick Street market after closing hours. Why do not the gilded youth who own them drive out to places like Richmond for a good time? The answer is, because they cannot get a good time out there. But if the clubs were thinned out in our area they would migrate. One must have vents for high spirits, and drains for superfluous wealth—but why not, as in Moscow and St. Petersburg of old, at resorts outside the city? Let them go out and have a good time with the gipsies at Hindhead. That would involve a minimum of the social evil which naturally springs from riotous living in the midst of the city.

Ah, but I hear it said, you are mistaken about night clubs; many of them are entirely innocent, the best people go to them; frequently after a raid it is found impossible to publish the names of the visitors and guests; they are so utterly respectable, and it is considered unfair to associate them in the public mind with that sort of life. I do not think much of that objection. Even at the Folies Bergères, in Paris, you see blocks of be-spectacled American professors grey-headed and grave. They are accidental; they go out of curiosity. Any sporting individual will take a chance of

LONDON NIGHTS

compromise just to look in on something notorious, and see life, as the saying is. There are also hypocrites in the ranks of supposed puritans. We English are unfortunately rather hypocritical in our ways, and it is leading us to our ruin. We ought to register our women on the streets; we ought to have all clubs open to police visits; we ought to recognise, but limit and control, certain resorts. But we will not. We prefer to keep up an intermittent squalling on the scandals of our night clubs. We quote piously certain famous lines of the poet Blake: "The harlot's cry from street to street, Shall weave old England's winding-sheet." The night club is a Dorcas Society of a kind; they weave winding-sheets there.

Putting Soho to Bed

I HAVE sometimes been dismayed, often amused, by a common sight near midnight—friends conducting to a cab a gentleman whose legs have failed him, a wife trying to detach a husband from a railing, a sailor or a soldier trying to get his girl to stop shouting at him and come home. A policeman, the other night, aptly summed up his duties at the witching hour, as “getting the population to bed.” I had appealed to him for advice. As I was coming home from the theatre I saw a young girl lying on the steps of a house in Soho. She carried in one hand a large tin of Wren’s metal-polish, and in the other a gleaming bunch of Yale keys. It was a dark-haired flapper without a hat on. Her clothing was somewhat disarranged.

A middle-aged woman standing by addressed herself to me. “Why don’t you give ’er a ’and if yer call yerself a man? Some o’ you young fellers, give ’er a ’and,” she added, looking at some others who had come up.

More cautious than gallant, I decided not to touch. Two others, however, essayed to pick the girl up. But when raised, her muscles seemed to give under her. Now she flopped forward, now she flopped back. They sat her down on the Soho pavement.

She began rubbing her stomach with the hand containing the tin of polish, and complained of

LONDON NIGHTS

her pains—"Oh, I do feel bad; oh, I do feel bad!"

I began to think she must have been drinking the polish. At that time of the night she could not have been sent out to buy polish. A crowd gathered about her and about the young men. The latter looked down upon her with reproachful eyes and called upon her to pull herself together.

"Give 'er air!" cried the middle-aged woman. "Cahm on, don't crahd rahnd 'er—give 'er air!"

It was a cold windy night, and it seemed to me she had air enough. However, there were repeated efforts to get her on her feet. The metal-polish fell out of her hand. The two young fellows put their arms round her waist and, thus supporting her, slowly led her off.

The crowd dispersed. The large tin of metal-polish remained on the doorstep. I picked it up and followed the two men. They seemed much annoyed with me and would have nothing to do with the metal-polish.

"But she'll get into trouble when she gets home and they find that she has not brought the metal-polish," said I. "Put the tin in your pocket," I added.

All this happened in the street where I live. I found myself with a tin of metal-polish on my hands. So I went home with it.

On second thoughts, however, I came out again into the street and, seeing a policeman coming

PUTTING SOHO TO BED

along, I told him the particulars. "Perhaps you'd like to have that tin of polish," said I.

"No," said he. "If I take that tin of polish from you I shall have to take down your name and address and full particulars."

"In that case," said I, "I may as well keep it. But it occurred to me that she may not have been merely drunk; she may have been drinking metal-polish. She might die of it."

"I've heard of them drinking lots of things," said the Bobby jovially, "petrol, methylated spirit, furniture polish; but I never heard of any one drinking metal-polish. I shouldn't trouble about it. I've seen two or three being taken off to-night already. The fact is, about this time of night we don't do much else but put the local population to bed. We like to see 'em go off quietly whenever they can, and this party seems to have got off nicely."

So I returned indoors and examined my trophy, a half-pint can of lustre-producing Wren. Not much of it seemed to have been used by the poor girl. But although it says that it "contains no injurious chemicals," it also avers that a very little of it, applied gently, produces a considerable shine.

It helped to make the brass name-plate of Stephen Graham shine forth in Soho, but I should be sorry to recommend it as a substitute for camomile tea.

Evenings in Chinatown

I WAS dining one night with a Bohemian priest who prides himself on being found in the company of publicans and sinners—me for one—and I said to him, "Let's go down to Chinatown!" He said he had smoked a pipe with the Chinks many a time and oft. "Let's go and smoke some opium," he rejoined.

I said I thought the opium side of Limehouse nights was greatly overdone, and of course I was right. You cannot sail down to East India Dock Road nowadays and find an opium den at a word. Still, we had an adventure. We lifted a corner of a curtain in the East End and saw John Chinaman in his haunts.

Going into a Chinese resort at random we climbed some stairs and sat down among twenty or thirty Chinamen who were busily employed putting away chop suey with long chopsticks. There was an elaborate menu in Chinese on a wall. The boss, in a coloured sweater and with the pleasant social face of an ex-seaman, watched the white waitress fluttering to and fro.

"Where can I smoke?" called out the clergyman, indiscreetly.

"Oh, lor!" said the girl in a whisper. "What d'ye mean? Smoke opium, that's all lies."

While we were talking with her a tallish white man with flickering eyes came in. I at once recognised him as a man who had done time. At a

EVENINGS IN CHINATOWN

period when I was heavily engaged with social work I used to visit him in his cell. He was in for twelve months—a lonely bird. His wife deserted him because of his crime, and I had tried to effect a reconciliation. He came and sat with us. “Oh, no; there *are* places where they smoke, but the police are hot on them now. My brother-in-law, Quong, might tell you.”

“What, you have a brother-in-law a Chinaman?”

“Yes, my wife’s sister’s husband.”

“How does it work, being married to a Chinaman?”

“They make good husbands,” said the ex-prisoner. “By the way, would you like some whisky? I can get it.”

He went out to fetch some whisky. While he was gone in came two very lively white girls with coster gallants. “Hello, Daddy!” they cried to the priest. “Hello, old boy!”

I threw back some agreeable chaff. One of the girls came and sat with us, a bright young impudent hussy with drop earrings and a bauble necklace around her grey neck.

“Ever been in love?” I asked.

“Oo-er, naoh.”

“You ought to get married.”

“My sort don’t get married.”

“Nowadays it often happens,” said I. “You’re a good-looking kid, too. Where d’you live?”

“’Igh Street, Poplar.”

LONDON NIGHTS

"She lives at home with her mother and father," said the waitress. "Don't you, Pearl?"

"Yes, that's right; 'long o' me ole man and woman."

She lifted a tea-basin of whisky. "This for me? I'll tike it, share it with my mate, eh? Cheer-oh! See ye later."

We had much more talk. The clergyman got a little scared perhaps, and beat it down below. The ex-crook went off to find Quong, his brother-in-law, to take us to the Chinese club. Yellow faces swarmed about us, ancient, mummy-like faces of men who looked as if they had been slaves in China thousands of years ago and had been dug up to feast and make merry in stilly Limehouse on a Friday night.

The opium-smoking priest had never smoked opium. It was his way of talk. But real life is stranger than cinema pictures, and this little visit was worth many yellow romances imagined about the district. The priest would like to save Pearl's soul. I am to bring her to him. But I'm afraid it's no use saving individuals. Who wants to create a vacancy at a table for another little pearl? You must save the whole quarter if you want to save the pearls.

The chief feature which calls for comment in our Chinese community is the absence of Chinese women. Men being men, even Chinamen must have their women, wives or otherwise. The mixing always seems lurid and does not commend itself.

At Charley Brown's

IT was a forlorn wet night in the East End of London. The population of West India Dock Road seemed to have been washed up the side streets, and the great and gloomy highway was clear. At the corner of a street leading toward Millwall stood two dripping policemen outside a public-house on which was written dimly "Railway Tavern." There was a subdued yellow light in the saloon, and no noise—you would hardly think that you were outside a "public-house of common fame," popularly known as "Charley Brown's," a resort with a reputation for lurid gaiety and strange affairs. Once upon a time it used to be thought much "finer," by which was meant much rougher. Now with its dancing license, its music, and its mixed crowds, a man might take his wife in if he and she were good "mixers" and not too self-conscious.

Dare we go in? As it chanced, there were five of us, including a Toynbee man and his two charming sisters. We decided to leave the girls outside and then fetch them in later if it seemed possible.

So we men went in by ourselves. We made a striking invasion. The real fun proved not to be in the saloon but in the back part of the establishment, which was a gaily-lighted cave of harmony full of dancing and singing couples. Spruce barmaids with bright staring eyes handed the drinks

LONDON NIGHTS

across a substantial bar. There were chairs and tables, there was a fire burning, an open space for dancing, and a wreck of a piano on which a heavy-fingered youth was striking a bone dance. There were all sorts of pictures on the walls, and curios hanging in air.

Being a party of men we were approached by three unpartnered women; one, a poor sodden girl with missing teeth who asked one of us if he had not a brother a sailor, the next a smartish painted quean who asked for a cigarette, the third a very much broken blossom in shabby rose-leaf finery who said she would mind the Toynbee man's beer while he went out to fetch one of his sisters.

Our hats and our collars were out of place; the men wore scarves round their necks and danced with their caps on. Some of the painted girls were smart, and they danced holding cigarettes in their fingers, in natural apache style. They sang while they danced and beered while they sat; a sprightly, much-rouged girl collected coppers for the pianist; a blind man also was led round for pity's sake.

A curious atmosphere! Extraordinary trophies hung in air or reposed under glass. There was a dried-up woolly cobwebby lamb with two heads; a camel's hump; a dusty human skull without lower jaw—long ages ago it had gone to its rest—there were glass balls used to float those nets used in the war to entrap submarines. Beside them



BILLINGSGATE FISH-PORTERS

hung a British war helmet with shrapnel hole in it, a death hole, it had not saved its soldier; assegais, rifles; a jar of serpent's eggs, a horrible monstrosity of a fish the size and shape of an ostrich egg but having a nose and fins. This, I found out afterwards, was a sun-fish, sometimes called a gasping shark. There was also a dried-up never-born human baby; a fortune-telling life-size doll; monstrous grime-covered birds, certainly a vulture, and perhaps an albatross, and with it bits of wrecks of ships and the pilot's thumb of the weird sister.

When a sailor is paid off this is one of his favourite first resorts. The bar has the rash scenery of those who fear not God nor devil, and it has provided the stage for some drama in its time. However, to-night, the spell of the dance holds; the men eye us askance—it would be easy to get into trouble—the faded girls with their dreadful rouge contrasts ply us with sentiment about mother or outrageous stories, hoping to be treated; the musical carpet-beating of the piano goes on; the spruce barmaids with uniformed faces draw beer and deliver; the men push the girls like rollers round the room to the strains of the music and sing when popular choruses are indicated. Suddenly there is an invading roar; some noise from without sweeps into our ears, comes, and then rolls past. It is a train, full of ghosts, going to Eternity—yes, but going to

LONDON NIGHTS

Poplar first. For remember, it is the *Railway Tavern*, and takes its name from the rails that run past it.

The Toynbee man fetched in his sisters for short periods. The broken blossoms looked at them with doubt. It is so difficult to tell a respectable woman nowadays. The girls of Mill-wall wear smart hats and similar dress to that of vicars' daughters. But some of them would like to tear a vicar's daughter to rags if they could fight her. However, our girls were well protected.

"Well, what do you think of it, Beatrice?"

"It's the first time in my life I've been in a public-house," she announces incautiously.

Time to go out. On the whole I think the company is tiring of us.

Saturday Midnight at Piccadilly Circus

I WAS at a café dinner the other night. Foolish, I admit, for I'd rather lose an evening than lose the morning after. But there you are. The lamps were red, eyes bright, and the president, the toast-master, drank to every imaginable person on every imaginable pretext.

"Gentlemen, I will drink with all those who had a bet to-day!"

"I will now drink with those who did not."

"Now I will drink with those who won."

"And now, if it please you, with those who lost."

Meanwhile a concert-party entertains, and when one sings: "What do you want to live to ninety-nine for?" the president does a step-dance on the platform. And when a pretty girl finishes a coon song some one offers her the flowers from the vase on his table. Then a dozen men dash for other flowers and empty every vase and, surrounding the elegantly-gowned little girl, offer her armfuls of dripping marguerites. Her dress! Her dress!

"Now, boys, for the great chorus—"Om tiddly om pom om-pom-pah! Altogether, pianissimo first and then fortissimo."

The "boys" sang, the girl and the marguerites went out.

Then the president said he would drink with Mr. Blank, and that done, he announced that he would drink with Mr. X.

LONDON NIGHTS

A convivial occasion, very happy and careless. It was all very much in the spirit of Piccadilly Circus, our court of gaiety and pleasure.

That was on a Wednesday. But Saturday night is the great night. Often on a Saturday I used to sit with a friend at Oddenino's or the Imperial or the Royal till all were turned out, and then walk with him to Hyde Park Corner and then back to the Circus and Soho and back again to Hyde Park Corner, talking of all sorts of things in heaven and on earth.

Piccadilly Circus in London is the equivalent of the head of the "Great White Way" in New York. If it is less lighted up it is not less dramatic and spectacular, and it becomes more and more one of the sights of London at night. The people all move. Round and round the magic figures go—all except the country visitors, who stand in groups and stare, all except those who have promised to meet at a certain point.

There is always a crowd on the southern corner of Piccadilly, staring at the sky signs—at the car with the silver wheels; at the red crystal bottle which pours port into a waiting glass; at the gyrating coloured pin-heads of New-Pin soap; at the stars of Hennessy's brandy and the old gentleman who sees cats intermittently when the brandy-stars go out; at the baby with the illuminated forelock sucking a bottle of Nestlé's Milk; at the gilded letters of the Chinese restaurant; the bright

PICCADILLY CIRCUS

white light of the Monico, the revolving shadows of Saqui and Lawrence——

Fathers and mothers stand with their children pointing out the pictures. They are, of course, strangers more or less, not habitués. The nightly crowd does not give the illuminations a thought. Its mind is on Scott's or Rayner's bar, on the "Troc," on the Pavilion chorus, on the Regent Palace lounge. Every one is on pleasure bent, and as you stand there in a crowd you'll seldom hear grumbles or complaints. You do not hear the usual:

"I said to 'im, if you want to go with 'er, go with 'er, only leave me alone."

As they reach the Circus the people of Regent Street, Shaftesbury Avenue, Piccadilly, all stop grousing, all cheer up, as if that Eros, now, alas, invisible, still ruled and had some power over men and women's hearts.

Piccadilly Circus is especially the resort of girls of all kinds; there you may see the three little girls in blue, the summer girl with slashed skirt, the public-house hussy with the bunch of bobbed, hennaed hair, girls chaperoned and unchaperoned, regulars, pirates, the cerised lips, the pencilled brows, starers, loiterers, hurriers.

Throngs move incessantly back and forth from the bars; the *delicatessen* shop on Shaftesbury Avenue is packed to the doors with mixed humanity grabbing at sandwiches and coffee;

LONDON NIGHTS

Johnnies are waiting for their ballet girls in Great Windmill Street; coloured gentlemen wait to escort home their favourites of revue; a prominent notice at the Trocadero informs that no lady can be admitted to the café unaccompanied; men and girls plunge into Oddenino's and the Imperial for last drinks and sandwiches before midnight; six hundred to a thousand people swarm in the vast lounge of the Regent Palace Hotel, chattering, many of them, in foreign tongues.

The Regent Palace lounge on Saturday night looks more like a great café in Vienna or Berlin than anything else in England, and holds an immense attraction for the visitor to London. Here you see also many Americans, and some of the real woolly ones from in-back home, from the glad wilderness of Kansas and Iowa.

Here you see old ladies who have refused to go to bed at ten sharing some of the rapture of Piccadilly. Here you may see "poor dear mamma, contriving to look supernaturally grand," sipping her ice-cream soda with the air of one used to such dissipation.

At the naughtier cafés it is different. You cannot take wife or mother there. Red-faced men come with redder-faced girls and sit at broad tables and clamour for drinks, make scenes, shout. Bachelor vagrants find girls' arms slipped into theirs. Females show their *abandon* by sitting on an ankle. The ballet girl kicks the brim of her young man's hat as he takes her past the bar. The

PICCADILLY CIRCUS

knowing men know all the girls they see; the knowing girls know half the men they see. There are winks, greetings, beckonings.

Waiters ply between the long line of simmering viands and the broad tables where the customers are sprawling. There is a sense of rush, of heat. The people who were turned out of the public-houses at closing time have filled up the cafés. Many arrived half-seas over, but they still crave more of what they've had.

Meanwhile, out in the Circus itself bedlam is let loose. All the chariots of London seem to be converging towards the fountain. The traffic is, as it were, in some great mortar, and a giant is pounding it with a half-seen, shadowy pestle. Cabs, flivvers, Rolls-Royces, pleasure parties, country parties with dogs looking over the hoods of their cars complacently without a bark, late river girls with Thames freshness still on their cheeks—or is that colour also from the silver box?—whistles, whistles, whistles, shrieks for taxis, tides of pedestrians, red buses like dragons swarming their way through scores of octopuses.

Every bus halt has its hundreds waiting to get home. For now is the great demobilisation of pleasure—from the gay centre to all the humdrum suburbs and the stuffy box-spring beds. But some who wait seem nowise eager to get on to buses or into cabs. Some are sitting on the pavement edge, others lounging against walls. But only one flower-vendor remains, and she, a big and beery

LONDON NIGHTS

woman—no ravishing flower-girl—sits beside a slop pail and a box of violets. She is all that is left of the week and its work. In a few minutes it will be a new day and a new week, and the centre will be emptied of its peoples.

Down go the lights in the cafés; the iron gates swing half-along, the Johnnies and the gallants and the *chasseurs des dames* settle with the waiters, women's laughter pours outward to the street, and the women will soon follow that way, too. The illuminated clock above the Chinese restaurant says five to twelve. At midnight all the denizens of the cafés come forth and make for various clubs and resorts. Men and women go off in taxis, and the man asks the woman the address and then whispers it to the taxi-driver. Men arrive at the Circus in cabs, drop their women companions there, and then go to their clubs. The women fall into the arms of other men they know.

"To the G—— Club!"

"To the R—— Club!"

One hears the victims of pleasure arrange for the rest of the night. In the Circus the traffic has rapidly thinned. You notice the thousands of various-coloured bus tickets on the asphalt. The cars and the cabs plunge across at twenty miles an hour without a hesitation. Lights have gone out, and the site where the archer stood above the fountain has become the cenotaph of pleasure.

And so 12.30, 1.30—all life is emptied from the place where it strove and rushed and circled. The

PICCADILLY CIRCUS

hot blood has gone—old age, emptiness, and waste-paper remain.

Even at eight on Sunday morning Piccadilly Circus is more like a covert in the wilderness than the capital of pleasure. And lost cats, turned out of doors till Monday morning, wander round and round seeking a chance bit of meat or a saucer of milk. You learn much about humanity at the Circus.

Moral Perils

IT is a long time since we used to sing "The poor girl didn't know, you know; she hadn't been in London long." The girls of the country know as much as the girls of the town nowadays, and their brothers, when they come to London, are not backward.

Still, they do get into trouble upon occasion, for London is a much more dangerous place for the young than it was, and there are a whole set of new perils of which our fathers and mothers when they were young never dreamed. A whole series of mischances have come to my attention lately, and I think a straight talk about them may not be unhelpful to those who for one reason or another come to London and find themselves at a loose end or among dangerous associates.

First, the drug evil. It has grown out of knowledge. It is becoming a common feature of the streets in some parts. I was in a bus coming up Tottenham Court Road and a red-faced, bright-eyed girl got in and sat next me. She sang, she punched the conductor playfully, she rallied the other passengers. I thought she was tipsy. But a working-man on the other side of me whispered: "She ain't as drunk as she makes out." Then he leaned across and shouted out to her:

"Hi, give us a pinch!"

She paid no attention, so he shouted again the

MORAL PERILS

same words, ingratiatingly smiling at a stout painted lady opposite.

The hysterical girl then turned to him and said: "Ow, garn, not in 'ere. Come into the Orshoo."

With that she pulled the cord, and the said working-man and the stout painted lady got down with her and they moved together toward a public-house door.

There was one article of attire which distinguished her from a drunken flower-girl, and that was the tattered reticule she was holding.

The reticule and the snuff-box are much watched in London now. The unfortunate American saying of "Try everything once," is making way, and one of the dangers of taking drugs once is that there and then you may form a craving which will never leave you. It is a simple step from taking cocaine to giving it to others. I see numbers of young women about, "carrying the dope." They do the dangerous work for the quiet merchants who have their hidden stores. Unfortunately it is not these clever business men who are brought to book, but the foolish girls who take it out for them.

The West End swarms now with plain-clothes men who watch the drug traffic and the newer forms of vice. It is often alleged that they graft on it and that the bigger criminals know how to save themselves. I saw a sensational and terrifying arrest of a young girl in Soho one night. She

LONDON NIGHTS

was one of the carriers of the stuff and was walking along one of the purlieus of Dean Street, near the Royalty Theatre. A detective followed by a policeman came striding toward her, and when they came up to her and confronted her, the air of the dark alley was rent by a piercing hysterical shriek.

"I've done no wrong," she wailed. But they laid hands on her to march her along. She relaxed and fell. Then policeman and detective picked her up, an arm each round her waist and a hand under her knee. And she kept calling out: "Father! Father! Save me! Save me!"

From all the little slum houses out dashed the crowd. They all knew what the girl had been doing and had little pity for her. But she never ceased to cry "Father! Father!"

In Wardour Street they were met by a grey-headed man who stopped the police and asked them what they were doing with his daughter. Then they put down the girl and she rushed impulsively to the old man, throwing her arms round his neck and weeping floods of tears on to his shoulders.

"You are my father, aren't you?" she sobbed. "You are my father; save me, oh, save me!" Alas, it was too late. The police had sent for an ambulance and in a few moments she was pushed into it and rolled away to the police-court, to trial and to prison.

Women are brought to court for different sorts

MORAL PERILS

of crime nowadays. Formerly they got into trouble for accosting men. Now you hardly ever see a case of that kind. Accosting is winked at. But the law gets its women victims in another way.

Similar new dangers confront young men. I think young men from provincial towns coming to London for a holiday stand some risks which are little understood. It is easy to get mixed up with a semi-criminal gang, easy to be made the scapegoat for the wrong-doings of associates.

A bookmaker will say to a young fellow: "How many bets do you think the people in your boarding-house make on a big race? Why don't you collect them for me? I'd give you a commission." And before he has done it three times he is under arrest—because the detectives who watch and try to control street betting are quick to see newcomers who are fresh to the game.

Gambling resorts are very much more common than they were. A young fellow is taken to a dance club of doubtful repute; his natural curiosity is greatly excited. He has been to France, let us say. He is "no chicken." He knows the limits of his own possible naughtiness—or thinks he knows them. But over the door of all curious night resorts should be written: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." There are many sorts of ways of falling in the small hours of the morning. . . .

A nice quiet game of cards . . . a quiet smoke in the inside parlour, with the girls all in their

pyjamas. Fleeced, or doped, or to beat all, perhaps raided! Many houses of evil resort have exits on to the roofs and there are dives into other houses. When the police come the real criminals get away and the victims are swiftly caught.

Among the new perils are some that are unmentionable in print. There are now a whole new set of "unmentionables." But the conspiracy of silence regarding them constitutes an added risk in our life. There is a great deal of disgusting vice in London, and by the press you might think there were no prosecutions. The details are not printed. But go to a West End police-court and bide your time, and you will soon hear revealing cases of the kind I mean brought forward. The young fellows are so afraid of publicity that they commonly put up no defence, even if they are in effect not guilty. They misinform their relatives and friends regarding the nature of the crime of which they have been convicted. A young fellow whom I know recently came from the Midlands to London for a holiday. One night he fell in with an acquaintance who belonged to his home town. They went to see "Our Betters" together. When they came out of the theatre they had a drink somewhere and then walked up and down Piccadilly watching, with youthful curiosity, the behaviour of the women. They parted at midnight in Piccadilly Circus. A minute later a stranger came up to the young man and said: "You look more like a girl than a boy." He grinned

MORAL PERILS

sheepishly, and the next moment he was arrested. He is liable now to be blackmailed for the rest of his life. I cannot say more.

Which leaves me with a moral to point. And I do not point it idly. To all young fellows and young women coming to London for a good time—don't think you know all the pitfalls; be careful in your choice of associates and in the places you visit. One petty accident in the haunts of vice may ruin the whole of your life.

In the Fourpenny Gallery

I

A STREET leads into East India Dock Road. It has eight fried-fish shops, and on Saturday night clouds of white vapour and smelly steam of boiling fat roll upward to the Poplar sky. Happy buyers with satchels jostle one another getting into shops where notices inform you that "Relief tickets are taken here." The public-houses have arcades wherein an overflow of customers stand and tope. One walks along to what may be called "Eel Pie Corner"—for there is so much eel pie for sale. It is just by Blackwell Tunnel and the dock gates. Thereunto I frequently resort to see life at the other end of town.

My wife and I went to a music-hall one Saturday night to see the fun. "Show yer the stalls, lidy?" said a small boy, hopefully.

The stalls cost a shilling. But we made our way up the gallery stairs, followed by the jeering mirth of loafers who thought us to be "out on the cheap." It only costs fourpence in the gallery, and I had made the mistake of wearing an overcoat. No gallerite down there possesses an overcoat.

Still, we paid our coppers and went in. An attendant, seeing that we were "clars," made a place for us to sit down, though scores were standing. The theatre was thronged with the denizens of dockland. The floors were covered with peanut

shells. There was a whispering, grating chorus from the whole gallery, of the cracking of hundreds of monkey-nuts, a rustling sound which never ceased. We sat down on nut-shells, and our feet dangled among them. One could imagine one was sitting on the seashore.

A revue was showing. Bare-legged girls marched past as soldiers; elegantly dressed concert-parties sang glees in the light of shaded lamps, while the "wandering violinist" crept and crooned about the stage; a third-rate Robey dialogued with a third-rate Grossmith; a naughty girl pointed a giddy toe at the circles and made love to the men. The male audience love-called to her, whistled, mewed. They blew penny trumpets, they sang the choruses.

They greeted with derisive laughter some of the "things we see in dreams"; for instance, a tableau of a wet day in Poplar and a clerk coming from the Labour Exchange to a man's home to bring him the dole and save him going out into the wet. And when an ambitious soprano indulged in romantic crescendo they caterwauled at her, told her to take her voice home and fry it. They picked upon the gawky dancing-girl who did not quite do her part, and called out to her, "Go it, long 'un!" There were coster flappers wedged among the lads, and they tittered nervously at the exploits of half-naked girls upon the stage. Youth round about kept referring to what they called "tarts." When an actor incautiously remarked that he had

had a dream last night it was the signal for ribald shouts to him from self-conscious males. What an odour in the theatre! The stalls reeked upward to the circles; the circles to us. A notice said that any bringing bottles would be instantly expelled. Less dangerous missiles went back and forth from the stage. Luckily, tomatoes were dear at the time. There were many men engaged trying to keep order and stopping wilder forms of excess.

Many songs were drowned in noise wherein the shelling of nuts was the persistent background. But every one settled down and was happy when the orchestra struck up, "Oh, how I love my darling!" Dock youth sang, rolled their bodies rhythmically, beat time with their feet, got together, and forgot everything else. This was the best moment—the interval between first and second acts—a persisting music, a persisting happiness. Young fellows who had come in with newspaper wisps of chips sang this song even with potatoes in their mouths. Before the end of the performance, however, many bethought themselves of the "pubs," and struggled out to get a drink.

The theatre was like a Moscow theatre after the revolution, with the eaters of sunflower-seeds invading the haunts of the intelligentsia and spitting seed husks all over the floors. It is a Red crowd; not Suburbia; real London, the alternative London. I thought, as I sat there among the nut-shells, how curious it would be to see that audience filling

IN THE FOURPENNY GALLERY

Covent Garden, with a demagogue speaking to it from the Royal box.

II

I returned to the fourpenny gallery, and had an even more amusing night. Before sitting down I swept the peanut shells from the seat. Away down below on the stage a pretty young vocalist was singing "Nobody has ever kissed me," and the youths of the gallery were whistling to her and calling, "Give us 'arf a chance."

She sang a little and danced a little. It was one of the innumerable variants of "There's a man wanted here," and was a typical music-hall turn.

But it became even more typical when she was interrupted by a supposed member of the audience acting the part of being the worse for liquor and intent on breaking the girl's innocent record. New mirth enkindled as the vocalist flirted with him across the footlights. The youths in the gallery guffawed.

But still it improved when another supposed member of the audience also began to interrupt; this time a bellicose and beery middle-aged lady in a lurid bonnet.

"I'll teach you," she said. "I'll teach you to interfere with other women's men. Keep yer 'an's orf 'im, I tell yer, or it'll be the worse for yer."

The orchestra stops playing.

LONDON NIGHTS

The girl sways helplessly, and pretends to look much scared and annoyed.

Then the old woman goes for her supposed husband. They show their devotion by outslanging one another, till the old woman sobs and the old toper sobs also, and they dry their eyes together and make it up. Then at last the injured wife is able to look with triumph at the daring young thing waiting helplessly on the stage.

"Proceed with your song," says she.

The girl seems to cheer up.

"But, one minute," says the old woman in a thick, solemn, beer-sodden voice. "Before you continue, young woman, I'd like to tell you something about your voice. It is this. As a sing-ger, as a sing-ger, mark you, I think that *you* are a very good dancer." The youths in the gallery are infinitely pleased. They had forgotten that expression—"as a singer you're a very good dancer"—but they've got it again now.

For, of course, it is not original; it is part of the general stock-in-trade of music-hall comedy. The whole make-believe interruption was also something well understood and quite expected. Seldom does one sit through a programme without make-believe interruptions from the audience. No one is deceived by them unless, perchance, a country girl just up from the village, one who "hasn't been in London long."

A comic star is singing on the stage, but a bloated and most disagreeable theatre attendant

has appeared amid the stalls calling in a dreadful voice:

"Programmes! Programmes!"

Or it is another well-known comedian singing and some one in collusion with him starts a supposed scandal, calling out in an authoritative voice: "*I forbid you to sing that chorus.*" Or two men are playing on the stage, and one pretends to faint. Then a supposed doctor in the audience cries out with the tones of outraged science:

"It's a scandal, sir; I say it's a scandal."

"What's the matter?"

"I say it's a scandal; that man is dying."

Or it is a comedian as an airman, and some supposed Air Force officer, or dandy enthusiast in a box, begins to interrupt all the comedian's patter by remarks of exaggerated enthusiasm.

All that is stock-in-trade. But it is interesting how, even apart from the manner of presentation of humour, there is a set of jokes which are the common property of all the comedians. You may hear them as easily in Leicester Square as in Mile End Road. It strikes the unwonted visitor to the Pavilion as very original when Stanley Lupino says of some one: "He has bats in the belfry." It is not always grasped that the expression belongs to the music-hall at large, and is used by any comedian as occasion offers. It is currency at both ends of towns, at Piccadilly Circus or in West India Dock Road.

It is like the expression, "I've got that Kruschen

LONDON NIGHTS

feeling," which never fails to evoke mirth and scarcely ever fails to be used by some one in the programme.

"I am going to the most beautiful city in the world."

"Where's that?"

"Wigan."

"What do I look like?"

"You look like the son of Tarzan."

"No, you're wrong; I'm the Sheik!"

"He's got no money; he comes from Maida Vale."

"I'll have to consult my solicitors: Salmon and Gluckstein."

"Let's go over to Sam Isaacs."

"I'd like to have one, wouldn't you? Yes, *I'd like to have one*; let's go to the old 'Red Lion' instead."

The supposed stinginess of the Scots and of Sir Harry Lauder in particular, are greatly exploited themes; nearly every Scotch turn or joke being no more than a variant of the other.

All successes are endlessly imitated. I do not know that the original songs and patter suffer by being imitated, but it is sometimes painful to listen to a would-be Scottish comedian with rouged face and bright green tartan kilt trying to re-hash Lauder songs, making sly remarks about his sporran all the while.

One of the most clever of the humorous songs of the past is "Burlington Bertie from Bow." It

IN THE FOURPENNY GALLERY

was astonishingly popular in the Army, and especially with the Guards, perhaps because of the priceless lines:

I'm Burlington Bertie,
I rise at ten-thirty,
To Buckingham Palace I go.
I stand in the yard
While they're changing the guard,
And the King shouts across "Toodloo."

Burlington Bert, if you remember, had not got a shirt; he was Burlington Bertie from Bow. When the Queen asked him to stop to lunch, he said, "Thanks, no! I had a banana with Lady Diana, I'm Burlington Bertie from Bow."

And now one hardly visits a music-hall without hearing some sort of re-cast Burlington Bertie. The audience does not necessarily detect it. It sits back and enjoys it, revelling in the mirth of "Wandering Walter from Wimbledon Way," or "I'm Charlie Golightly—what-ho!"

Charlie Golightly dines with Sassoon at the "Ritz." "Sassoon" has now become as much a music-hall property as Tarzan. But Charlie Golightly inevitably explains in his chorus that it was not the "Ritz," after all, it was the Hotel Rowton House, for he's "Charlie Golightly—what-ho!"

I have no doubt that all the real live comedians keep enriching the general stock-in-trade of the music-hall. Directly a hit has been made with a certain joke, the joke goes round and gets some-

LONDON NIGHTS

how into the repertoire of all and sundry. When Vesta Tilley left the stage she bequeathed her wonderful conception of the young man, the gay spark, the giddy son following in father's footsteps. It is almost as if there were a Vesta Tilley seed which had been sown; there are little Vestas growing on every stage.

Unfortunately, this makes for some monotony at last. People expect to have old jokes to laugh at, but do not want to laugh too often at the same ones. Wigan and Tarzan have to be dropped in time. The day will come when it will be useless for a comedian to explain:

"It was that last Guinness did me," or

"Where are the doin's?" or

"I'm Mademoiselle from Armentières."

They will have been said at too many places at the same time too often.

I believe the success of the negro comedians in their Plantation Revue was due more to a complete absence of the English stock-in-trade than to their own personal originality. They are drawing from another stock.

Florence Mills's wonderful song—

He may be your man,
But he comes to see me SOMETIMES;
And when he's with you
He's got ME on his mind—

is by no means unlike a whole host of funny songs which I have heard from coloured comedians in

IN THE FOURPENNY GALLERY

negro music-halls in America. The negroes are very good and have now several modern imitators. Not the least clever a white girl who, having the whole negro intonation, made a great hit with a song entitled:

I'm the one-man woman
Lookin' for the one-woman man.

There were not a few negroes in the audience, out with their white coster girls. They seemed to appreciate it as much as any.

The coon romance seems dying; the quaint Southern burlesque seems to be taking its place.

So, hey for Creole gumbo! It tastes well in New Orleans, but it is a greater novelty in London. It is a wonderful soup, with all sorts of things in it, and its quality depends on the stock.

It would be a mistake to think that the use of the general stock is the sign of a second-rate comedian. Observe closely the patter of the greatest of "stars"; you will see much of their cleverness depends in using the well-known jokes and catches more adroitly. In the music-hall you seldom hear new things; you hear the old more cleverly re-set.

At the Other End of Town

IT comes rather as a jar to a young man and his girl when a boy in buttons, examining his tickets B 1 and B 2, says: "B for Boob, second row from the front." It is no use reporting him to the girl who sells the programmes. She will get a laugh out of it also. "Your ticket is B, isn't it—well, what yer worryin' about?" It's all part of the fun.

Watch the dancing chorus. Every one of the girls seems to have her eyes on some one, one even on you, trying to make you laugh. They are all in camisoles and struggling to put on frocks. Rather shocking? No, only laughter-seeking. *The leading lady will ask male help.*

All the girls come among the audience and request young men to do up their fastenings behind, and not one returns to the stage till she is "done up." Some old grouser has a powdered darling almost on his knee. Does he not loosen up and grin? All are conquered by mirth.

Two men in Palm Beach suits come on the stage and give a "take-off" of American "hoofers," comedy step-dancers, chewing tobacco or gum, while they speak as if their noses were trumpets, paddle their feet, and see-saw with their shoulders.

"Say, you gink, you bonehead, d'y'know who we are? W're just two melancholy murderers, we-are-the-ass-ass-ins-of-gloom! Gloom hasn't got a snowball's chance in Hades with us. Should

AT THE OTHER END OF TOWN

have seen how we went over in Dayton, Ohio. Oh, boy, they're laughing yet. Ye can hear them howling on the wireless." Truly they make American vaudeville artists seem more funny than they really are.

Americans get their humour by tall talk and brag; we get ours by swank and laughing at ourselves. So Colonel Coldfeet of the Coldcream Guards walks in and blows out his cheeks, and swings his cane and rubs his monocle and gives himself away. The Coldstream Guards is one of the most famous regiments, but it would be thought funny beyond words if some Coldstreamer in the audience stood up and protested against the fun and the funny Colonel.

We're never afraid when we're on parade;
We're the idols of the nurse and parlour-maid,

as a popular ditty once expressed it.

The brave man who is not brave, and the man who won't fight are inexhaustible sources of mirth. "Oh, dear, I'm getting very deaf. 'A feller arst me to 'ave a drink the other night. I could 'ear that all right. We 'ad one or two. He begins to tell me of the girls 'e'd known. When 'e'd done ah descrabes to 'im a girl ah noo. What d'yer think? He puts dahn 'is glass an' sez:

"I'll punch your bloomin' 'ead. That's the girl I'm goin' to wed. I'll punch your bloomin' 'ead, I will."

"I said 'Oo?'

LONDON NIGHTS

"He said 'You.'

"I said 'Me?'

"He said 'Yes.'

"I said 'Oh!'"

I heard the other night Charles Coborn sing "Two Lovely Black Eyes"—an oldish man now, for he was the original singer of it a quarter of a century ago, sang it every night for a year:

Only for telling a man he was wrong,
Two lovely black eyes.

It was the same sort of humour; the laugh at oneself, a quick facial expression suggesting the blows and the swollen eye-sockets and a peeping mirth at his own expense.

The same man sang originally "The Man that broke the Bank at Monte Carlo." He sang it thirty years ago. It almost succeeded as a comic song in 1923:

I walk along the Bois de Boulogne
With an independent air.

The eyes of a great young audience were fixed upon that comic strut. They did not know the song very well, but it was good. Coborn tried to get them to sing the chorus with him, and there, I thought, was a moment of strange pathos. For, surely, more than half of those who sang it with him in the Tivoli so long ago are dead by now, or in any case far from the music-hall.

In his day the music-hall was not what it is now.

AT THE OTHER END OF TOWN

There was a feature which has been quite removed. It may still seem to be sometimes an annexe of a public-house. But the *demi-monde* no longer plies its trade therein.

The cleaning up of the audience has helped to clean up the stage. There has been a long and steady progress away from impropriety. The saloon-bar and smoking-room is no longer legal tender across the footlights. Even the features of low burlesque disappear. The male comedians no longer infallibly split the seats of their trousers in every act and walk sideways in mock distress.

There is much cleverness on the music-hall stage to-day, humorous personation, and upon occasion quite Dickensian scenes. Indeed, there is a much truer reflection of the mind of the English people in the music-hall than in the "legitimate" theatre.

The comedians of to-day are not content to fill up their time with old gags; they have so much to make fun of. If it's not the "garden subbub,"

Away from the noise and the hubbub
Where we make our own stewed rubbub,

it is the absurd ticket-collector at the entrance to the lift, saying "All-tickets-please, all-tickets-please, further-down-the-lift, further-down-the-lift, further-down-the-lift," or it is a take-off of the nursing home with the absurd nurse saying every time she is in the room: "By the way, while I'm here, I think I'll make your bed."

LONDON NIGHTS

What skits there were during the war on every aspect of our unusual public life! Surely, it showed us what a funny lot of people we really are, and what an appetite we have for fun.

Nero, the terrible lion, eats a man alive at every performance. His blood-red cage stands on the stage. Dreadful feeding-time howls resound from within. And the new attendant discusses the situation: "Here I am playing second fiddle to Nero-ohhh! Would any gentleman or . . . lady like to step up and try our lion?"

Some one tired of life staggers on to the stage. "No, it's hardly fair to the lion," says the attendant. "I'll make the sacrifice; I'll go in. Remember me to friends at the vicarage. Say I made a good end. Let my wife know only to make tea for one. It's a far, far, better thing that I do now. . . ."

The attendant goes in to Nero. There is horrible squelching and roaring. The owner of the lion puts up a notice: "New Attendant Wanted." And then the surprise: out comes the attendant from the cage and rolls down his sleeves and turns the notice round to the reverse side on which is written: "New Lion Wanted." Curtain.

Even little children—and many are taken to the halls—call to the stage or ask father about it all, and laugh and clap with the rest. It is a family outing. It is no longer the beer-sodden audience which in the old days a magnetic little Vesta, singing "Following in Father's Footsteps," could alone

AT THE OTHER END OF TOWN

vitalise and make one, but a lively, eager, expectant crowd, mostly young, it is true, between the ages of five and fifty.

There are few people left to-day who would condemn the music-hall as a low pleasure. To them we might say, in the words of a Lancashire comedian, "You big lump o' nowt, go and have a look at it for yourself!"

*Election Night**December, 1924*

A DARK, strange, feudal mass upon the river, and rolling fog, and heavily-cloaked men and women fighting the atmosphere as they make toward Whitehall. The face of Big Ben has been obscured, but somewhere aloft, above the white fuming fog and enveloping dark, the clock tells the hour—in grand and solemn tones, in muffled chimes. Fog rules while the political destiny of England is being counted.

Faint candlelights change to lanterns which you think some watchman must be swinging, and then suddenly the lights are seen to be those of a big red omnibus which has come over Westminster Bridge, crowded with people, all out to have an "Armistice Night." They are the average London people, and they care nothing for fog or rain or snow or tempest of any kind. Give Mr. Jones, of Peckham, a false nose, and Miss Miles, of East Dulwich, a rattle to shake! Wedge them in a sight-seeing mob and let them shout and sing and cheer, and one night of their existence will not have been spent in vain.

What a night for a great street carnival! The fog did not simply descend upon London. It came rushing to us as if it were being driven across London by a strong current of air. It looked often like the fumes of the war, as if some enemy were

ELECTION NIGHT

making an attack upon us under cover of a moving smoke-screen. The fog surged down all the narrow streets, but rolled in white, curling billows along the main highways.

There were possibly fewer people in the streets because of the fog, but they looked more. Into the wan light of a street corner hundreds of heads emerged, chattered and passed, hundreds of heads, thousands. People stared at strangers' faces because of the constant surprise of the said faces suddenly emerging from the dark.

Most glorious sight of the night were the moving, glowing, charcoal fires of the chestnut vendors. You would see no face nor human form from above and no wheels beneath, but a rosy, glowing, heartening mass of hot coal gently approaching you. "Chestnuts! Tuppence a bag! Chestnuts!" A hoarse voice, and then the kindly, grimy face of the man who was calling coming like a shadow-form into view. The chestnut-men did a great trade.

"Buy some chestnuts t' warm yer 'ands!"

"Put 'em in yer pocket!"

"'Ere y'are; tuppence a bag!"

Trafalgar Square was the rendezvous of thousands. Thousands lost themselves there. The fog became incredibly dense. Bus conductors walked in the road ahead of their buses, trying to find the way to go. Yells, cheers, songs, hurrahs, squeaks, and infectious murmurs were borne across from unseen crowds and groups. No election results

LONDON NIGHTS

could be seen at that time. My friend and I had a discussion as to which was the way to the Strand. We walked towards a given point, and huge lions came into view, a belligerent-looking lion with gleaming flanks. Under his nose girls and boys were having a wild confetti fight. A group of red-faced men in paper Highland caps came into view. Then men with false moustaches and beards, Charlie Chaplins, then again Mr. Jones of Peckham with a paper nose seven inches long, and scores of young folk with squeakers and rattles.

Somewhere, I believe something became visible in Trafalgar Square at some time during the night. But we missed it. We diligently sought the Strand and Fleet Street. The fog was so great that we passed the offices of the *Morning Post* unaware that its windows were bright with light and plastered with results and that a great crowd was watching. Somewhere near the Gladstone statue a "loud speaker" was laughing with mocking laughter. For a while that was all it seemed able to do. Results were going up. The Manchester successes for Free Trade were shown, and the monstrous voice bleated over the cheering crowds: "Horror! How! How!" as if somehow it was Fate behind the fog and the night and mocked at us. However, in Fleet Street the fog seemed greatly less, as if journalists had been out and had cleared some of it away. Sweetness and light ruled in the office of the *Daily Telegraph*; a young fellow in

ELECTION NIGHT

the *Manchester Guardian* office spelt and read out results in a loud voice; journalists at the bar in the Press Club deplored the defeat of Winston and jested at the expense of Barlow and Mond. Printing House Square hummed with activity. Shoe Lane was unshod.

One of the greatest crowds of the night was, however, at some distance from this mart of news. It was at Selfridge's, mart of hose and lingerie. The whole first floor of Selfridge's had been cleared for one of those spectacular Anglo-American entertainments which Selfridge delights in. There had been considerable excitement as to who would obtain "invites" for the Selfridge dance. Every one wanted to be there. For there was bound to be a great sense of the drama of the election.

So it was. Behind the red glowing windows the dancers danced. Down in the street below a marvellous mob stared with upturned faces at the screen where the figures were being indicated. The vehicular traffic had been diverted: Oxford Street belonged to the masses. It was such a crowd that it held itself together. Once in it you could not get out of it for an hour. It was sufficiently tightly packed to be warm. Every one was happy. There was an extraordinary absence of political ill-feeling. When a Liberal gain went up there would be a wave of cheering; when a Conservative gain appeared there would be as great a cheer.

LONDON NIGHTS

And Labour, needless to say, made itself heard.

The adherents of Labour provided most of the amusement in the crowd.

"Up Labour!" they cried. "Up Trotsky! Up Ramsay MacDonald! Nah then, you Lloyd Georgites, where are yer? Another Labour coming! There she is! Ooo-ray! What is it now? *One, two, three. . .*"

Every time the Labour total was changed a squad of young men started to count in great shouts: *One, two, three*, etc., until they reached the number of the total, when they would all break into a wide hoarse cheer. After midnight Labour gains came in thick and fast. Manchester, in the early hours, had given a rare fillip to Liberal figures, and the crowd had begun to think there might be a Liberal landslide. Thousands only wanted to know who was going to win in order to cheer. They wanted to be on the winning side. "It's Lloyd George's election" was heard on all sides. Liberal cheers gained in volume. But there ensued a very lean time in Liberal victories. The Labour successes piled up and overtook the Liberal figures. A triumphant yell broke forth from the crowd, and all the speakers squeaked and the rattlers rattled when Labour took the lead from Liberalism. Thousands changed at once into supporters of Labour—for nothing succeeds like success.

We struggled out of Oxford Street and met the hawkers with the first morning papers. "Defeat

ELECTION NIGHT

of Lloyd George!" one of them cried, knowing that that would sell the papers.

"Good news to-night!" cried one absurd hawker.

"Oh, good news to-night!"

I bought a *Daily Express*.

"Tuppence!" cried the hawker. "Same price as the *Times* to-night!"

Two *Times* vendors passed us. Said one to the other: "I don't know what the country's coming to;" the other murmured a reply. Staunch Conservatives these.

At two a.m. the morning papers were making as much clamour as evening papers make at two in the afternoon. "All the winners, all the winners! Election results—piper!"

With huge bundles of damp newspapers the hawkers plunged through the fog—and sold their papers.

I think the Conservatives went home first. The Liberals followed. The Labour partisans remained. At three in the morning every one seemed to be Labour. A silk-hatted gentleman in Covent Garden, coming forth with a young lady in low-cut rose-coloured dress, seemed appalled by the Reds and evidently thought a revolution might be in progress behind the screens of fog. But every one was in a good humour. "The Labour movement," I heard it said, "began at the Sermon on the Mount, not at the taking of the Bastille." Labour is pleased. The figures of Kirkwood at Dumbarton are framed in the window of the

LONDON NIGHTS

Morning Post. Night-birds, usually to be seen round coffee-stalls, stare at newspaper office windows.

"Joe Chamberlain's out," says one to another.

"Garn, 'e's been dead donkeys' years."

"'Is brother, I mean."

"That's Birmingham, ain't it? I ain't seen the bloomin' sheet put up."

So, election night and humanity in the fog; always in the fog, mental and physical, not knowing what it's all about or why it came to be, or what Protection means, or Free Trade, or the Capital Levy, but ready to cheer. Seldom has a fog been so enjoyed.

CHAPTER 32

'At Battersea

March 6th, 1925

ANSWERING a S.O.S. call in the afternoon, I spent four hours lifting the "apathetic voter," as they call him, from home to polling station, which generally meant carrying also a score of children yelling to one another and singing something about:

If it wasn't for the law
We would punch 'im in the jaw
And we won't vote, etc.

But two hours after the urns had been closed I repaired to Battersea Town Hall to hear the result and have some fun.

Here already, Saklatvala's army was collected, crowds of dowdy-looking old women with beery faces and red hats and wearing the green and red favours of Labour. One of these wild women was the centre of an admiring circle of male fans and fellow women. "Doan call yerself Labour, call yerself Communist!" says she. "And dahn with the flag. Kahm on nah, altogether:

No cheers for the Red, White and Blue,
No cheers for the Red, White and Blue,
No cheers for the Red, White and Blue.
It's the flag that has downed all the workers,
So no cheers for the Red, White and Blue.

LONDON NIGHTS

"Good old North Battersea! We'll keep the Red flag flying there."

"Some of us belong to the South," cried one.

"Garn, I'd be ashamed to belong to South Battersea," said the woman.

A fair-sized mob had gathered, though well under control, for there were a score of police keeping a way for the electric trams to bore through. Almost all were Reds, but the situation changed about a quarter of an hour before the result was declared, when a number of young fellows marched on to the scene bearing an enormous naval flag. One man held the pole, others held the flag out in the air.

The Communists greeted it with derision. The youths carrying it cheered, but the boos were more noisy.

"Take the rotten thing down!" cried a pallid girl in spectacles.

"Take it down and burn it!" cried a dark-skinned youth.

But there was no movement to rush the flag. The holders of it were not many, but they were a stalwart squad. They took up a commanding position and sang "Land of Hope and Glory: banner of the Free" against all comers.

One man with a red rosette turned to his neighbour and said: "We're not all foreigners, though we 'appen to be Labour men."

Our attention was, however, taken by the appearance of the Socialist members on the

AT BATTERSEA

balcony of the Town Hall, greeted with volleys of hoarse cheers. North Battersea's Reds were in. Mr. J. G. Butler read out the figures, and then in a pause after the cheers called out dramatically: "Will the lady reporter put that down!" At which every one laughed.

Then to the sound of groans the South Battersea result was announced. The holders of the White Ensign marched forward and, standing at attention, sang "God Save the King." About thirty men took off their hats. The rest, infuriated, took up the long-drawn-out strains of:

We'll keep the Red flag fly-in' 'ere!

There ensued such a confusion of sounds as is seldom heard; one group singing one thing, and the remainder of the people another. Hoarse cheers punctuated, and then came more speeches from above. The proceedings happily terminated by the eruption of the Unemployed Band, which had been biding its time beside a huge hoarding advertisement of "Darwin was Right." Out they came with whistles and drums, and almost the whole crowd followed after. It paraded North Battersea with the tidings of victory, growing as it went to be double its size. The patriots with the Ensign went another way. But as the Reds trailed past me the last I heard of them was the American song of the Down and Outs being sung in chorus.

LONDON NIGHTS

I went to the house and I knocked at the door,
And the old lady said, "I 'ave seen you before."
Hallelujah, here we come,
Hallelujah, come again,
Hallelujah, give us a hand out to revive us again.

Battersea's Soviet was enjoying itself.

CHAPTER 33

Around St. Paul's at Midnight

1924-1925

THE chorus of London's revelry grew as the night wore on. The clash of glasses and song swelled from innumerable open windows. London was merely whispering at seven, but the cars were multiplying upon her streets; at eight she was all agog, the pavements were thronged, the cars and the cabs along the side of the kerb were in long black queues. The diners-out, the gala-nighters, were swarming to the restaurants and the hotels. A drying wind had come on duty and was polishing up the streets and at the same time blowing open the white scarves of the full-dressed and tinging with real colour the cheeks of the pallid. At ten, when wine began to speak and fiddles to reply, I could have thought I was in Constantinople or the gay streets of Cairo. There was the gaiety of an Eastern city at night. I sat in a room in Soho and from all hands I heard the growing chorus of London's voices and laughter mingled with the mocking-bird calls of the saxophone and the playful squealing of Hawaiian guitars. It grew to eleven, and the shrill voices of portly commissioners and the hullabaloo of manœuvring motors in packed streets. Then the theatres released their audiences from the fiction beyond the footlights; then we went to St. Paul's.

The music of the bells of St. Martin's tossed on

LONDON NIGHTS

the wind toward us as we sped to the Strand. They were clashing forth their call to watch-night services. Crowds were collected in Trafalgar Square to see the year out there and watch the electric news-ribbon running across the sky. They were pushing and scrambling up the stone steps of the church as if escaping from a flood, as if the Thames flood were reaching them, but singing lustily in contradiction: "It ain't agoin' to rain no mo'."

But the sight of sights was St. Paul's churchyard packed with one of the most good-humoured talkative crowds I have ever seen on the London streets. The buses had long since been diverted. The great cathedral seemed to have been enlarged. Ludgate Hill was the nave, the Circus was the gate, the vast churchyard was the choir, the building itself was the altar, the shuttered warehouses with their familiar names were like memorial brasses. But the mighty congregation was not in church, it was on the spree.

The silence which the absence of buses had made was filled with the voices of the crowd. All the walls of the shops and the cathedral echoed with noisy choruses of human talk. Coming up from a quiet side street like Godliman or Dean's Yard, one entered suddenly into the most astonishing human hubbub. All the world was there, and all the world was talking. Curiously enough, when I got sufficiently near to the cathedral to hear it, I noticed that hundreds of sparrows

ST. PAUL'S AT MIDNIGHT

accustomed to sleep in quiet about the walls were chirping for all they were worth; like true Cockneys they entered into the spirit of the great gay night. "We're all here," shouted a stentorian if beery voice in the crowd. *Here, here, here, here*, chirped the many sparrows.

We met the New Year with laughter and song. But why did hundreds of men add inches to their noses for the occasion? A feature of this night was the lurid pasteboard nose stuck on to the real nose. Those funny noses poked into one's cheeks at every turn. There were long pink noses, long green ones, false whiskers, false moustaches, grand paper hats of many colours. The tall men in the crowd leaned back on the shorter ones and looked upward; girls with upturned faces sang up to the eyes of the men they were with. There were hundreds of groups all singing different songs without conflict. Clerks seemed somehow to have got mixed up with factory girls, and they leaned on the crowd together, singing as if it were a hymn, "O what a pal is Sall-ee."

It was by no means a Scotch gathering. No nicht wi' Robbie Burns this, not even wi' Harry Lauder. I heard the pipes skirling beside Kensit's shop. A Whitechapel Highlander was playing the "March of the Men of Harlech," and a few lads were singing in Balhamese a remembrance of "Stop yer ticklin', Jock."

A song which is so fitting that it might be called the anthem of St. Paul's was started by one or two

LONDON NIGHTS

voices, at once caught on, became a chorus, an enlarged chorus, travelled on the wind, swept the great paved foreground, and searched its way down Ludgate Hill. It must be a thirty-year-old song:

The bells were ringin' the old year out,
And the new year in.

Men and women whistled and blew their squeakers or threw in air serpentines of coloured paper. Hooligans in strings holding one another's coat-tails stampeded portions of the dense crowd to give way and let them pass through. Vigorous circles of girls enlarged and expanded to give room for disorderly skirt dances; other circles did the same, but seemed to imagine they were Indians careering back and forth to the sound of the tom-tom. But at times, enveloping all, came the chanting of this half-known song and such lines as:

The logs were burning brightly.

The photographers added something to all this. In answer to their repeated flashes and reports the singing populace lifted its hands and waved its hats. One photographer stood beside the statue of Queen Victoria, and a young fellow in the crowd was so intent on being prominently pictured that he got himself lifted bodily above the crowd. There, with hat in one hand and toy trumpet in

ST. PAUL'S AT MIDNIGHT

the other, he seemed to be making an obeisance to the old Queen, who looked not in the least surprised.

What a contrast, the passing of 1924, to that of the war-years! I remember 1916 under the shadow of the dome. There was not a light in London. The architects' guard up above walked round and round the galleries and the roofs watching in case of air-raid. Down below there was a wild mixture of khaki and women. They passed bottles to and fro; they cursed the passing year. "To hell with 1916!" was the cry. But no one cried "To hell with 1924!" We were all indulgent to the year that has passed. In Queen Victoria's days we used to say: "Old Year, you must not die; old year, you shall not die." We have not quite got back to that. But we know that 1924 was a genuine peace year and brought heaps of happiness for all sorts of people.

The crowd is tranquil; it has a feeling of a good time coming; it believes in 1925. I heard not one political reference the whole night. The tall policemen with their on-duty faces seemed almost superfluous even in that great throng. Their ambulances seemed irrelevant. There were women there with dogs in their arms; fathers with small sons on their shoulders; there were cripples from the war, invalids but lately out of hospital. Few came to any harm. The big bell sounded the witching hour of night; it bloomed forth, silencing us for a while. We were wedged between the

LONDON NIGHTS

years and stared upward toward the stars. There was a great magnesium flash splitting the old from the new, rending the darkness of night. This generation was aware of itself—somehow got into the picture. The bells tolled as if some one were dead, and on the great candelabra where 1924 candles are burning, one for each year of the era, another was lighted. Above the merriment and the din one hears the haunting strains of "Auld Lang Syne." Millions in other places are listening and listening-in and waiting to lift their glasses. At one resort in London trumpeters blew the reveille for the year. All hail, 1925! London has welcomed you. A second quarter of a century begins.

In Rotherhithe Tunnel

C HILDREN of Stepney were using the whole of the Rotherhithe tunnel as a loud speaker, their shrill voices trumpeting and turmoiling through the tubes and vaults of the long, strange underway. Night had subdued the thunder of traffic, and as we journeyed from South London to Wapping by way of the tunnel, we went by dark, deserted ways and saw streets named after Paradise and Cathay.

The tunnel was empty and presented a vista of continuous electric lights, trailing their gleams like comets' tails. Its white-tiled roof stretched on ahead of us and lost itself in a grey haze. One had the feeling of making a passage from world to world. The Thames flowed above our heads, but we did not hear it; all London was about us, but was invisible. All we heard were children afar trying their voices in a way that sounded like the cries of lost souls. The great day-traffic of the tunnel was gone, and now in its place mournful-looking couples walked slowly along the footway. A man came towards us with two carpenters' sacks on his shoulders, but he said not a word as he passed. He looked like Pilgrim and his burden of sin.

Spiral staircases, however, rose up at points, and the roof gave way to what looked like watch-towers, and, standing under these great vents, one could look up all the way to the stars. As we

LONDON NIGHTS

paused under one of them and listened, we heard as from a great distance church bells tolling mysteriously and dismally.

Surely this tunnel, where little boys in red jackets sweep up after horses by day and the air is full of smokes and steams and gigantic sounds, is one of the queerest place in London, as strange by night as it is unwonted by day.

While we waited at a bend near mid-tunnel, came a sound that scared us and raised the hair on our heads and bid us almost hold on to one another in fright. It was like oncoming hell and the destruction of humanity at large. Some gigantic force was approaching, driving all before it, but ahead of it came armies of yelling fiends, clearing a course, smashing and blinding and destroying. What a nightmare sound! Truly, nightmare merely; for it proved nothing more fearsome than a belated empty Ford van passing from North to South London. When it had passed it was like doom having passed us. Its long and dreadful retreat gave way to silence and whispering and the renewed calling of church-bells and unseen children trying their voices and echoes somewhere afar off.

By the northward exit we rose into Shadwell, that curiously-named place one-half associated in the mind with shadow. Shadwell, the place of shadows, whispers the mind to those who have never been there. And it is a strange shadow-land

IN ROTHERHITHE TUNNEL

after the warehouses are locked with their huge padlocks and the work of the day has ceased. The homes of the people are square and black and low. The walls of storages are sheer and blind upon the narrow streets. A furtive rat runs across from one great premises to another.

You wander along the banks of the invisible river, seeking a view-point whence the tunnel towers may be descried. So to the Wapping water-front, King Henry's Stairs, Wapping Old Stairs and the little pier. I had never been on these stone steps by night, and now a beautiful sight was vouchsafed, the majesty of the river mirroring night. Street lamp reflections were like lighted warehouse windows under water. The dark blanks of actual windows took glimmering points of light from the waters. A church tower in South London stood back of the Bermondsey wharves like a spectre, and three gigantic cranes with square boxes at their middles look first like great crowbars with broken handles and then like three young storks of a giant brood rising from the water to peck at the sky.

A hoarse cackling tug went by before our eyes, bearing down stream a vast shadowy barge, with water following after and a tide lapping on the dank stones. We stood on King Henry's little pier and scanned the levels for the towers of the tunnel, but descried nothing. Down below all was the curious white passage in inferno, but above was the romantic beauty of the river by night.

The Thames Tunnels and the Stairs

THERE are long, strange passages under the Thames in East London, and I often wonder how it is there is no under-Thames roadway in the west. Blackwall tunnel, the Greenwich footway, and Rotherhithe tunnel might well prompt the thought—why not a tunnel at Waterloo? These long, white-walled tubes without trains give more sense of the greatness and energy and immensity of London than any other features of our vast metropolis. An earthquake which ruined our civilisation might seal up these tubes for millenniums, but when discovered in another era, what strange imaginings they would prompt!

Every passing through the tunnels is a Stygian adventure. One plunges into a strange, murky atmosphere. The first time you go into one you may even feel fear; the noises and the echoes are seemingly fraught with calamity. Fog, the smokes and steams of traction engines, petrol vapours, are thick about the gleaming, white-bricked roofs. The light of the electric lamps is dulled from brilliant white incandescence to dull thwarted red, and these red points trail away to nothingness, blankness, obscurity. One is descending, one is going under, one is bearing all London on one's back, and the soul staggers under the load.

There is a famous coffee-stall at West India Dock gates. Homeless casuals sleep near it for a



INSIDE ONE OF THE TUNNELS

THAMES TUNNELS AND STAIRS

chance of waking up in sight of a job in the morning. The trams and the buses switch away toward Plaistow and Canning Town. One feels to have come to the end of the world. The police who stand there at night on their lonely posts look like passport officers, though one's soul will hardly have to show a passport when it comes to make its melancholy passage of the last river. A great wall shuts off Poplar and Chinatown, where East-erners and costers mingle in careless passion. One takes a valedictory glance at it and plunges into the tunnel. One goes onward and onward; it is a long journey. Being underground doubles the sense of its length. Especially in the case of the Rotherhithe tunnel, you imagine after walking through it that you have done miles, though I doubt whether from exit to exit it is more than half a mile.

Blackwall tunnel is shorter, but it is with relief that you fetch up at last in new country, South London, somewhere between Greenwich and Woolwich. The remembrance of the gloomy East End with its concentrated populations has been purged in the long tunnel, and you come up as into a promised land. Despite the slums we know, is not everything south of the river holiday-land?

I have made many trips back and forth by the tunnels, and they are familiar to me. Nevertheless, no familiarity can rob them of their eeriness. They figured prominently in a night out I had with two Australians; one a young Rhodes

LONDON NIGHTS

scholar, fresh at Oxford, the other, Rick Elmes, our artist. We met at Soho, at the end of a Sunday night after-dinner gathering. My other guests went home, the Aussies remained, and we wandered about London together till dawn. We first paid our respects to Old Joe, at the Hyde Park Corner coffee-stall at one a.m. His night also was only beginning. Thence we went to Smithfield Market, and then to Chinatown. We were in those much-described Chinese streets, Limehouse Causeway and Pennyfields, at two in the morning, and we went by byways through Poplar to Blackwall. Chinatown was black as if under the cap of the extinguisher of death. Unlit, empty, and drab, I think it was much more awe-inspiring than during the gas-lit hours, when white coster-girls with their Confucian lovers hobnob with chopsticks and drink whisky from tea basins. Not one flickering, half-bred child darting from a doorway, not one mummy-faced self-sufficient Eastern, summing one up through his half-opened eyes! All Chinatown was like a deserted barracks at night.

"What vice there must be behind all this!" said my Australian friend. "Not vice, but mystery," I urged.

Then while Poplar slept we made a lonely journey through the long, empty, gleaming tunnel to sleeping Greenwich. It was awfully, dismally silent, and we thought we could almost hear the waters of the Thames slipping past us overhead,

THAMES TUNNELS AND STAIRS

thought of a tug and a barge dropping down stream with lights glowing, or of a laden trawler steaming up to the fish market at London Bridge. As we stood, with stilled hearts, we could hear as it were a sighing, a prolonged sighing, escaping from the heavy heart of the world.

At Greenwich, a mile or so on upstream, we descended those strange red-brick towers that mark the long footway to the Isle of Dogs. I had not been there since the night out with Frank Morley and "Claribel" a year and a half before. Down, down, by an iron spiral, by a clangorous, corrugated way, we made our unwonted journey in the depths of the night into the depths of London, and we came to the long, narrow passage built for the transit of the workers to the Isle of Dogs, narrow, gravelike, utterly unearthly. One's steps echoed both ahead and behind one, and the reflections in the gleaming walls were like fading phantoms. If ghosts walk where men walk not, one might see one in that Greenwich footway at that hour.

Then we went to the Rotherhithe tunnel, which was much freshened by night air and absence of traffic for many hours. It was completely deserted, like the others. It is not straight, but winds about like a gigantic worm. It turns and turns, and its curves catch lightbeams which give ridge-like effects to the white-tiled flanks. Every light of the long series has a yellow tail, a comet-like wisp of inferior light.

"This is London too!" said I to the undergradu-

LONDON NIGHTS

ate. "There are one or two sights left over after you have been to Hyde Park and the Zoo."

We came out in the dank air of Shadwell. Then we went down once more to the stairs, the old stairways down to water edge. Father Thames, with stars in his hair, floated grandly on to the broad waters. It was still and it was beautiful and it was good. The tunnels told of an enigma which would never be solved; the enigma of London's sorrow, her burden, her slavery. The stairs, looking on life that flowed by, found it fair. "A day of London lies behind us, a day of London lies ahead," said Father Thames. "We live for a day at a time. It is enough if we can live for a day."

Then bells of half-forgotten churches began to chime the first hour of the morning. Alarm clocks went off all over the slums; lamps began to burn in little windows, and that day began—another London day for London men and women, some above water, some below it, in tunnels and on stairs.

Driving in London After Midnight

DRIVING home a late guest the thought sometimes arises: Why not make a tour of London first? The taxi-driver sometimes does that without being asked. But even if you say to him: "Drive where you like for an hour," you are not likely to see London aright in the witching, after-midnight hour. There is something disturbing about taxis, something of the prison-van; they are children of the Black Maria. On the other hand, none of those big, hearse-like, covered cars are any use. You cannot see London with the lid off if you have your lid on. But if you wear a wig, make secure its fastening, for it is forward through the night air and the breezes of the corners of the squares and the whirlwinds of the Circus—in an open car!

Lord Rosebery, because he could not sleep, used to go forth in his carriage after midnight, driving across and across the solitary ways of the West, like some phantom visitor forced by hidden fate to appear in London in these hours. I often wonder what peace he found in the grand empty streets, what poetry was his. I confess to a very strong fascination of London by night. It began by long walks, tours of the Embankments and the markets. It is rather an experience to see at how many coffee-stalls you can "pass the time of night" betwixt the last bus and the first. You step out of a matter-of-fact city into a fairyland London.

LONDON NIGHTS

After many tramping nights, rainy, fine, cold, and foggy, the opportunity came to drive.

In the first way you see London at night in detail; in verses, in lyrics; in the second you see it in general; in impressionist pictures, in fantasies. When you drive you meet no lonely tramp who pours forth his sorrows; you are not wanted at the coffee-stall, your presence hushes the extravagances of the homeless harlot, you do not stop to examine the faces of the night-sleepers on the cold stone steps of churches. But you obtain a strange sense of London as a whole, London in its place in Time, London in the pages of history.

You can go down Throgmorton Street by day without a thrill, but hardly so in the dead, silent hours when the City is before you without business, when you are presented with the freedom of the City by the Night Lord Mayor, his Eminence the Moon, when the Man in the Moon is playing his banjo over the Royal Exchange, and that Bastille of the business world, the Bank of England, is in the power of star revolutionaries. Silence at the Mansion House. Lamplight picks out patches of the roadway and shows their polish, polished by day by innumerable bus wheels and cab wheels and policemen's feet. The traffic jams have long since been called off and are a bad memory of another era. Take what turn you will. Go the wrong side of a shelter if the fancy takes you. No one is sheltering. There is no one cheeping on Cheapside. The way to St. Paul's and the

DRIVING AFTER MIDNIGHT

way to old Newgate, the way to the Docks and the way to Finsbury, the way to Bishopsgate and the way to Aldgate are clear and dead and strange as if lately cleared by excavators and archæologists. You look at your guide, you imagine the busy throngs of other days, and heave a tourist's sigh. So this was London!

You choose one way and go along it. St. Paul's dreams above Ludgate Hill, gloomier than its Dean. "I am too heavy," it says, "I can never get away from here. I should have liked to walk to Westminster, a cheery place, I believe. But it's quite too far for me, and the roads are too narrow." Ludgate Hill looks like a sharp descent to a river—as no doubt it was once. Mother Earth speaks through the asphalt. The Circus is a place for mooring boats, not for holding straining omnibuses in leash. Fleet Street, partly alive, mostly dead, looks quite cadaverous. It is haunted by people of a bygone age, *pressmen*, who flit noiselessly about the churchyard of St. Bride. At a strange place called the Press Club bar, at three in the morning, you may stop and see the "creatures of the place" drinking beer, and others at a green table playing a strange ball-game, watching ivory spheres with leaden eyes.

Temple Bar is a charming pedestal; a cenotaph for the barristers laid to sleep in the Temple. The Law Courts, in peace and goodwill, are entirely disenchanted. No Bleak House character from the country is waving his papers and trying to get

LONDON NIGHTS

a hearing. Lincoln's Inn is dead still. The lamps look like incandescent snowballs and take innocent reflections from the shiny brass plates on lawyers' doors. The big-bellied letter-boxes contain only the letters posted too late for collection; these lie there all night and make the red paint look redder still, a redness from the indigestion of such a dish.

The night-police watch you if you stop in such an unlikely place as Lincoln's Inn. They quietly and unobtrusively note the number of the car. A visitor at such a time is an event. While you wait, the chimes of St. Clement Danes call to you over all the masonry of the law. You return by Carey Street. How many bankrupts have taxied thither in the day hours, pop-eyed and plausible, rich-wived and indignant! It is all clear now, as if angels had been on night fatigue to sweep a court of Vanity Fair.

You leave the law behind. Thence to the Strand, coruscating with closed shop-fronts. Its shops are like tightly-clinging limpets and mussels. It is decidedly maritime by night, or if not that, at least river-front, much nearer the river. Stopping by the Tivoli you smell river-air surging up from the barges and the bridges.

There is a feeling of the morning after a revolution in empty, wide Whitehall, but this grim emptiness is dispelled by the white and green lights on the river, the majesty of the bridges, and a great sense of peace along the stone ways. In Queen Anne's Gate there are shadows of sedan-

DRIVING AFTER MIDNIGHT

chairs in the darkness. King Richard on his horse lurks in the darkness outside the House of Lords, but is alive, not dead. Edward the Confessor seems to be sitting dreaming behind the walls of the Abbey. London by night is not betrayed to its future so much as to its past. The living are hushed to a foretaste of oblivion. All the ghosts are in the air, and the streets, shops, houses, palaces, are made free to them. Among them all some one's carriage is moving slowly—who is it? The carriage of a sleepless politician, or of a seeker of Beauty? We are all equally unreal. All men shall be ghosts to-night.

Midnight Drive to High Beech Church

MEMORY croons from childhood's days two romantic lines: "Listen, my children, and you shall hear, Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere." It did not much matter where he rode to, but that he rode, and at midnight. So there is a thrill in quitting the gay city at eleven and driving out into the dark to Epping Forest's lonely shrine.

St. Paul's, with its doomed dome, is a cathedral island or a castle of which the glimmering streets are the moat. The heavy-eyed warehouses look across the dividing stream at the blanching Portland stone. The first storey is soot-coloured, the second is a greyness which becomes a whiteness and a whiteness which becomes a cross. Over the cross is heaven and its flying clouds, and to cheated eyes flying stars, a flying moon.

From a tiny spire twelve miles away you can see the cross of St. Paul's. The eye joins the churches by day; the stars by night. We roll eastward into the enchanted City where poetry has taken the place of business. The house fronts are blacked out. Lamps are burning, but not for mortals—the fires of fairyland. If you had time you could find out what is afoot in the City—under the tree in Wood Street. But I observe in passing that that grasshopper transfixed above the Exchange has somehow got away. He is off duty at night and has gone with the gridiron of St.

DRIVE TO HIGH BEECH CHURCH

Lawrence and the key of St. Peter's, Cornhill, to open the kitchen of the flee-by-nights and cook a supper.

However, as we are not invited, my fair companion and I, we let the City slip behind us and enter once more the haunts of men, where gigantic trams approaching their termini come up with reverse directions on their electric brows. We pass out by the invisible Bishop's gate and enter Bethnal Green which has no green and Shoreditch which has no shore. It is dark here. A drab and strange humanity is hurrying homeward, slouching along narrow pavements or standing on doorsteps and giving a loud knock. We cross the fields of London, London Fields, and the wild heath, Cambridge Heath, without knowing it. No, perhaps the dreariness was Dalston, perhaps it was partly Hackney; there was clover under the asphalt, clover on Hackney Downs. The car impatiently jumps in the holes in the road. We pull up in a spacious empty place, looking at a Congregational Church, which, thanks to its Victorian buttresses, in the moonlight looks like a cathedral. It is Lower Clapton. We move from the inner to the outer suburbs. Clapton becomes Lea Bridge with majestical views of squads of poplar trees beyond reservoirs, and lights o' London on another side of town.

From Lea Bridge we topple into sleeping but restless Walthamstow, enormous suburban caravanserai, and we thread our way past empty,

moving trams to a forlorn tram terminus, the "Crooked Billet," named, as it were, after a tram ticket which once took a country girl to ruin. Here it is chill. The factory families sleep in the half-houses. The country is at hand. The Lea is breathing night mist over dank Essex. We climb to Chingford Mount and linger by the ruins of the old church on the hill, looking at the undying, gleaming lights of all the factories in the valley below. So to Chingford, and London has gone utterly. Connaught water looks like a lake in Irish poetry, a vision of lake water, vouchsafed out of shadowland. The ancient oaks are all Druidical. The forest road is drear as the road to Endor, and ghostly rabbits stare palsied at the motor lights as we advance. There is no sound of axe; the woodman at the "Woodman" is asleep. No keeper is about; Robin Hood sleeps in the Robin Hood Inn. Fairmead Manor has been rebuilt by moon magic and stands on the sward among the beeches. But directly my eyes travel thither the old house where boys played has gone.

There are trees both sides of the way, mist-loving hornbeams with blue-tits asleep in their tiny pockets. We go into thick matted veils of darkness and gloom, and then suddenly, at a clearing, amid the tree-tops and the stars—a spire. High Beech!

The owls yell in the high trees, but the wind whispers reassuringly over the wide forest. *Her hour, her hour*, shriek the owls, as if announcing

DRIVE TO HIGH BEECH CHURCH

a spectre, and then *Peace, peace!* says the wind. Then *dell, dell, dell*, the silvery chime of an unforgetting clock telling the hour to the trees. *Dell, dell, dell, dell*, happy human music, refreshing the soul, stilling the mind in the midnight hour.

So we stand there, and while the bell sounds two cigarette ends glow in a forest glade. We have no secrets there, however, but a love of beauty. Our end being attained, we return to the car—and passing through all the dark suburbs, reach the gay, enchanted City once again.

A Vision of Kensal Green

OUR Père la Chaise has a grandeur all its own, as those know who have visited it in the daylight hours. Industrial London, in the shape of a factory and two gigantic gasometers cannot outcrow with their drear reality the seeming unreality of the vast graveyard. "Kensal Green" is only a hundred years old, but Time has laid its artistic hand upon the mounds and the vaults, upon the tombstones and the mason's art.

On three sides the cemetery is screened from living London by a wall ten feet high. The wall is designed to save adjacent ground-rents from depreciation. Two human windows look out upon the great desolation; they are those of two bedrooms of "The Lion" public house. Other windows look out somewhere, no doubt, for when the body of Elsie Cameron was raised at night there were people who watched from their homes the lights moving in the cemetery; an astonishing glimpse of horror if only duly imagined.

There is one way of seeing this great graveyard at midnight. But it is obscure and strange. It is from the fourth side. This side is bounded by a railing, and beyond the railing by a stream, so happily called the "Grand Junction Canal"—as if, indeed, it marked that grand junction where the soul changes for another world, the junction of Time and Eternity.

To get on to the towing-path of this strange

A VISION OF KENSAL GREEN

water, one goes to a certain bridge in Willesden and drops down by an unremarkable passage. Then one walks half a mile along the black edge of the canal. One night recently, after the cemetery had been closed, I walked to this strange other view. It was late sunset, and an elusive pink light had come into the grey and pallid lifeless sky of a dreary evening. On the canal was a dredger called *Charon*, and a man with a broken hat sitting amid gravel heaps drinking his evening grog. His neighbour was a hulk called *Active*, standing so dead still in the stagnant water that there was a looking-glass reflection of the name mirrored beneath it. As I walked along the towing-path I realised that below it and below the level of the canal the vast array of gleaming metals of the Great Western Railway ran outward there from Paddington to the West.

Night settled down upon one of the most lonely spots in the world. The gravestones, which could certainly be numbered by day, seemed to be innumerable by night, as if new ones had come up out of the earth to join the others. Some were of unearthly whiteness, others the colour of night itself, just visible shades. The angels on the tombs seemed to be aware that the gates were shut and that there was no constraint upon them to remain immobile. They were preening their wings, they were hovering, newly alighted, they were thinking, even whispering. The Cleopatra Needles, the Pyramids and chapels, became the architecture of

LONDON NIGHTS

a living metropolis. The gravel roads became highways, the paths byways, in a city where there was visiting, where there were receptions of the semi-visible.

As I stood by the stream and looked across it, a street light became reflected in it, a veritable Excalibur. Vague moonlight made luminous the clouds above, but down below every sad poplar along the water edge became in reflection an inverted torch. It was a natural embellishment of marvellous grandeur.

Far in the darkness I saw the lighted Willesden trams passing deliberately, like meteors. Above me and at the back, the gigantic gas containers and measurers. But in front and beyond this curious Lethe was ancient Egypt, ancient Thebes, bleached in the desert; warning, remaining, from age to age, the London that was shut off from the London that is. There are lords and generals, M.P.'s, London County Councillors, bankers, philanthropists, the solemn Victorian age, once so substantial in the world's eye, now all refined and fragile and wraith-like, soft-stepping and quiet, like the mist on the other side of a valley.

How strange it seems; not a soul about. But a stone's throw away the children of the Notting Dale slums are calling wildly in the gutters. Their elders are drinking at the bars. The barmaids have carried hot-water bottles to the two bedrooms of "The Lion," and look out a moment before drawing the blinds. They and the moon



FROM KING EDWARD'S STEPS

A VISION OF KENSAL GREEN

and myself are looking on the ancient city called Necropolis. There is a creeping chill in the air, however, and I must forsake the scene. As I leave, the silence is disturbed by a strange black shape moving toward me. It is a dreary horse drawing an ancient, empty barge. That on the one hand. But on the other, the sudden fiery emergence of an express from Paddington, the engine furnace open and throwing spectral crimson into fast-flying steams, which red and white for a moment become grey and invisible the next. A glorious passage: a trainload of this generation *going West*. The moonbeams, however, undisturbed, are still playing with the angels on the tombs.

Zero Hour

THE Crimean Guards in Waterloo Place, muffled in their cloaks, look as old as they are at five in the morning. They have a somnambulist air, as if they had strayed out of their bivouacs in time past where, the last post having sounded, they sleep awaiting a réveillé. I see them only because I wear the goloshes of fortune. I wonder if the gentleman who put on that uncommon pair of overshoes could see the present time as well as time past.

The five o'clock chimes of Big Ben are blurred by the jarring, metallic clash of lesser timepieces. But Westminster takes longer than they do, and in the end prevails over them, booming forth the hour. It is a bitterly cold March morning; night still broods over London, and a searching north-east wind rattles the shop-signs of Piccadilly and raises yesterday's dust on Constitution Hill.

I take a walk which I often made at this hour, during the war, from my home to Wellington Barracks. I am curious to recover a time that is past. It certainly yields a thrill when I see soldiers hurrying to the gates and the great railings, lucky possessors of all-night passes. But much has changed. The red danger lights go off and go on in the electric road-lanterns opposite Buckingham Palace. At first I thought there were no sentries there. The wind and the cold had forced each man into the shelter of his sentry-box,

ZERO HOUR

where numbed figures with bearskins on their heads stood motionless as dead men tipped up in their coffins. There were big lights lighting the ground floor of the Palace, but all the windows of its vast façade were blank, all but one, a little window. Somehow that little window with its light made one think of the King who has lain there now so many days, as if it were his window and he had not been able to sleep, had turned on the light and was reading.

High above the building, looking black in the storm-driven sky, hung the Royal Standard, sign that the King was within. All London slept, but the King waked and was thinking of his city.

Six o'clock sounded. Still it was dark; no sonorous bugle-blasts outbroke as in war days. No squad of pipers began with gay step their lightsome music, their

Hey, Johnny Cope, are ye wakin' yet,

which sounded every morning on Wellington Barracks Square at six in the old days, waking, incidentally, not only the Guards but the nervous denizens of Queen Anne's Gate. The barracks was asnore. Even the war trophies seemed sleeping. A sentry, however, stepped out of his box and took a mild unregimental buffet to restore circulation. A policeman came to the Palace gates. A man with a ladder came to the lighted entrance of St. James' Park, and putting it against

LONDON NIGHTS

the archway, climbed up and put out the lights. A girl on a bicycle fled like a spectre along Birdcage Walk. Other girls appeared on the scene, perhaps going to work, early birds, certainly. They knew the Palace sentries, stopped and chaffed them in their boxes.

It reminded me of a different kind of night when I was a sentry in front of the Palace, and there had been an air raid. I walked up and down in the same cold air. Motor cyclists with bugles went past, giving the "All clear" signal. Girls might give a soldier on guard the glad eye in those days, but they never dare speak to a Palace sentry.

But the girls go on to their charing; the soldiers remain. Dawn shows a grey and unkind sky, one of the old bitter skies of the war, I thought, fitting sky to look down on dreary Northern France, not so fitting over happy London at peace. At half-past six the first bugles sound from the drummer boys on the Square, and their calls are answered by a rattling milk-barrow coming out from officers' quarters. First parade is still a long way off. It is full even grey and empty morning. The colours in the Standard have become clear. The sentries are steadily marching back and forth to keep warm, and the thought of relief and breakfast is in their eyes. The Palace lights have gone out; the police are on duty. The crocuses look shyly from the lawns, and birds are singing in the Palace gardens. A royal day begins with the natural music of a choir of birds.

Chiaroscuro

THE lights go out on London Bridge, but though it is officially morning, night persists. The burning lamps of motor vans stream into the mist; there are lights on the ships and barges on the river. Night and morning are at odds. Now the invisible Tower Bridge looms spectrally into vision, but it is only for a moment, and then it has faded out. The cranes at Hay's Wharf look like stairs to the sky. The new skyscraper, Adelaide House, with its pallid façade and stone-cut stars looks unearthly. But below it, below the first arch of the bridge, in Lower Thames Street, you see the gigantic out-thrust of Billingsgate Market, a welter of black vans and pale wooden boxes.

The Monument Tube Station has opened, and the first bleared passengers come out, shapeless, silent, like departing shadows. It is very chill, and poor workers in their boots stamp to keep warm. Fog closes both ends of the bridge. I stand in the middle, on the apex of its long, gracious curve, lean against the parapet and watch the stream of early morning workers come on. Collarless crowds come in waves, corresponding, no doubt, to the arrivals of workmen's trains at the London Bridge Stations and the arrivals of trams.

The sagging and soggy-looking under-eyelids of those who have but lately and perforce got up

LONDON NIGHTS

from their beds to start their day's work—the men with red handkerchief bundles and old red handkerchiefs round their necks; the trapesing women workers in floppy old boots. They come up out of the fog, stare at me standing there, and pass into the fog again.

Vans pound along the roadway, and as they come up the slope and are more in the strange light of the mist, the drivers seem to take romantic poses silhouetted against the mist and the sky, and become exaggerated in shadow like figures in a Raemaker's cartoon.

Porters with hand-barrows come wheeling fish from the market. Vans with dark sacks bulging with greens come plunging from Covent Garden to South London. But, coming the other way, behold the first red bus all lighted up and full of passengers, all the set faces on top swishing through the fog.

Come more and more people below, hurrying on into London; men in ones and twos, individualist, women in strings, gabbling to one another, social, more primitive. Their voices are strange; they say something, and they pass.

"Ever see anything of 'er lately?"

"Operated; a piece like that cut away."

Comes a grey derelict with ancient stump of a clay pipe in his mouth but no tobacco; comes a fat, red-faced man with a celluloid collar but no tie; comes a degraded-looking old fellow, all undone, lame, and with one hand in a pocket of his

old green cloak—he slouches to the City; comes a man smoking an old pipe and wearing a couple of waistcoats; comes a man wearing three waistcoats and a whitish muffler; come women with paper parcels, newspaper parcels, skinny and pinched and weather-beaten; comes a grey-headed old dame trolloping along, but on her face an expression of perpetual offence. Still more voices:

“No, I don’ envy ’er, d’you?”

“Naoh, that wasn’t it; ’e died o’ fright.”

“*And* Saturday. I’m dodging it.”

“Never fai-led.”

A bicyclist, with devil for mascot and a lamp still burning, spins past on the wet stones. A hawker comes along with uneven step, a box of kippers under his arm, just bought at Billingsgate down below. A lad in a once-white coat appears with a barrow and begins throwing gravel on the roadway; another with a broom is sweeping the pavement. The great crowd surging into London jostles him at his work. Commercial gents in felt hats mingle now with the workers. Young girls mingle with the drab olders ones—waitresses and shop-walkers. I notice a smartly-dressed clerk with a brief-bag in his hand, and a loungee with an unlit cigarette sauntering amid the fast walkers. Bus 21A, loaded to the limit, comes out of the fog with its glorious lights. The passengers look better dressed than those who flock along the roadway; the half-breathing, shuffling, steam-blowing crowd.

LONDON NIGHTS

Some come to London with a smile, more with a frown, more still with a gape. Some faces look like shops with shutters, others like shop-windows as the shutters are being taken away. Some, bowed to the incline of bowed shoulders on which tool-bags are resting, look like entrances to tunnels. There are no bright morning faces on London Bridge before six a.m., and I fear it would be little use asking God to stab the spirit of the workers broad awake. Each brings something into London to conquer it; but London conquers most who enter it. They come in with their tools, their skill, their savings; every one is carrying something into London. Dick Whittington has his cat. It is a wonderful cat or a merry heart that you need as you cross the bridge and start in to find life and happiness in the great city.

THE END

